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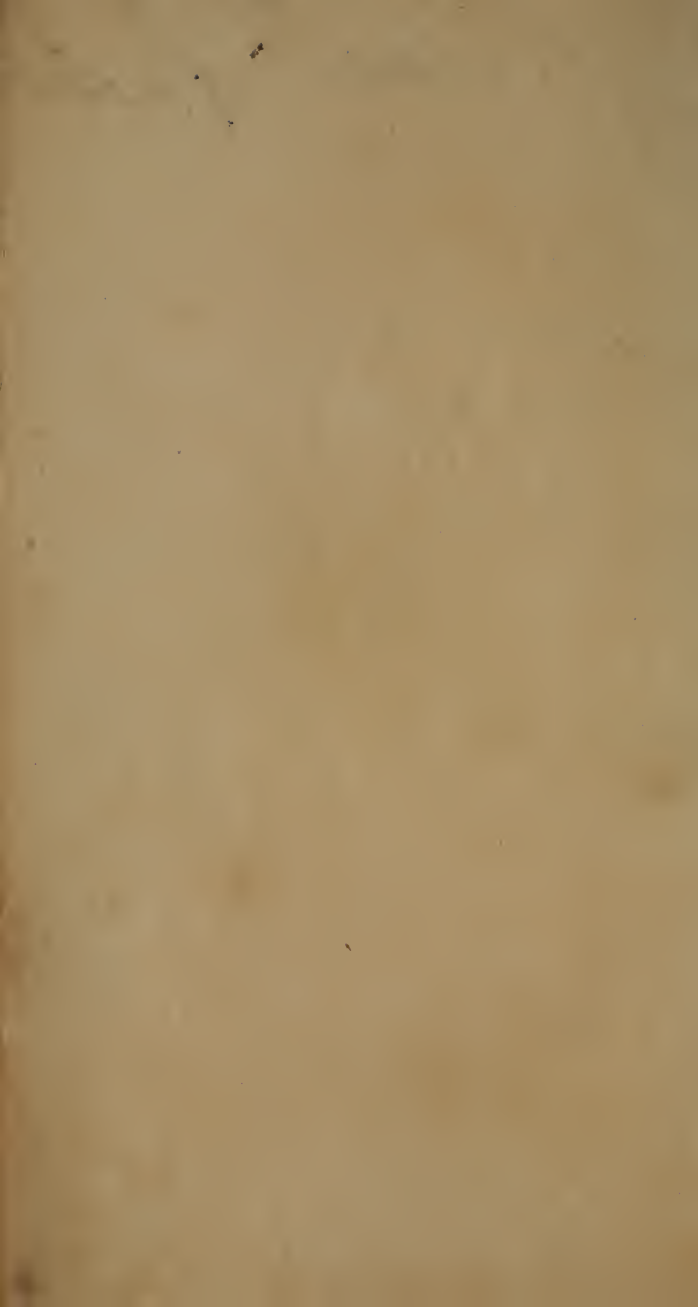
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"Well damn my straps and whiskers" says Tom "if this aint pleasant, blow m.

THE
MANNERS OF THE DAY.

“ Passant la moitié de leur temps à ne rien faire, et l'autre
moitié à faire des riens.”

MARMONTEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,
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1830.

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THE
MANNERS OF THE DAY.

CHAPTER I.

“ Il y a assez de bons mariages,—mais il y en a peu de délicieux.”—*La Bruyère*.

“ *Un bon mariage*,” which is familiarly translated into “a good match” by the colloquial English, of the fashionable world, is generally understood to include the promise of a park in the country, and a mansion in town; a set of horses, a diamond necklace, and an opera box; and it may be fairly allowed that there are many such marriages. An *excellent* match affords a mere multiplication of these advantages, and is unhappily of such rare occurrence

as to form an eighteen day's wonder; but still more rare, and far more difficult of definition, is the *exquisite* marriage imagined by La Bruyère.

And what, after all, are the characteristics of the *mariage délicieux*? Who shall determine the portion of felicity requisite to its existence, the mode of happiness exacted by its claims? While the worldly-minded assign to the qualifications of the good match an undue preponderance, the etherialized and sentimental discover an equally obstinate prejudice in favour of blue eyes or brown,—or the aërial perspective of a damp cottage covered with honeysuckles. There are many with whom prudence, that doughty spinster, “tricked in antique ruff and bonnet,” stands first among the cardinal virtues; and by these love is regarded as “labour lost.” There are many whose sensitive delicacy makes a merit of improvidence, and by these life itself is pronounced as “all for love;” and the world—the wide, wide “world—well lost,” if forfeited in his cause! But between these

fierce extremes, the happy medium of fair and firm and honest affection is rarely achieved ; and the Paradise of domestic happiness

That all

Which Eve hath left her daughters since her fall,

would appear to be seated in some remote region, still undefined by Admiralty charts ; or guarded by the sword of angry cherubim from human approach. Few indeed are the exquisite marriages of modern life !

Yet Helen Mordaunt's was generally pronounced to be a glorious exception to this sweeping clause of condemnation, or rather to be "unexceptionable !"—"most gratifying to her excellent family—most satisfactory to her numerous friends ;"—it was a superlative of eligibility ! Her younger sisters who were still incarcerated in the school-room, of which the back-boards and inclined planes afforded specimens of torture vying with the instruments taken from the Spanish Armada, and preserved

in the Tower of London, regarded her as an enfranchised dove, rescued from the dreary monotony of their ark. Her elder ones—each of whom was a necklace, and a carriage or two beneath her in the scale of matrimonial elevation—pronounced her destinies to have been influenced by a most propitious planet. For full three weeks, the poor girl existed in a clamour of congratulation.

Unfortunately there remained one solitary member of the Mordaunt family, to whose perceptions the promise of happiness afforded by the approaching solemnity, appeared of a very apochryphal character; one who was perplexed in the extreme by the contending scruples arising in a pure and feeling heart, required for the first time to become its own monitor; and shrinking from a responsibility so momentous to its happiness; and this was no other than the gentle Helen herself. Neither Brussels lace nor bridal swansdown,—neither the supererogation of interest suddenly lavished

upon her by every member of her own family, nor even the unobtrusive but unfailing devotion of *le futur* could avail to silence the murmurs of her mind, or calm the anxieties of a bosom, which

Misdoubting, asked if this were joy !

It occurred, indeed, to her simple and ingenuous heart, that the triumph exhibited by her parents at the prospect of dismissing her for ever from their fosterhood, was an evidence of personal indifference, peculiarly calculated to embellish the promises of that home wherein her presence was so fondly desired ; and that among the many who oppressed her with their extasies of sympathy, Lord Willersdale, her future husband, was the only inmate of Mordaunt Hall who was really solicitous to soothe away the embarrassments of her new and startling position, and to render it as subservient as possible to her own tastes and caprices—to her present pride and future comfort. He had, it is true,

none of the vehement gallantry, the extravagant adoration, and knee-worship of a boy-lover. He was not at all hours of the day pertinaciously fixed at her side, or jealously covetous of her attention ; but his distant eye was seldom averted from her countenance ; her slightest and most unnoted observation met an instant reply from his seemingly inattentive lips,—

And when she called another Abra came,

whenever that other appeared indifferent to so precious a summons. Still, however, the fervour of a lover's tenderness never animated those answers, or hurried that approach. The dignified composure of Lord Willersdale's address, was undisturbed either by the trepidation of his own feelings, or by the thousand trifling and ludicrous peculiarities of a lover's predicament in the home of his future bride. He was gentle and ingratiating, but so dispassionately tranquil in his demeanour, that Helen's cousins from Oxford, and brothers from Eton, mutually in-

veighed against him as the worst lover in the world.

“ I certainly do not love him as I ought !” was Helen’s apostrophe, as stealing away one morning from the joyous society assembled at the Hall, in honour of the approaching solemnity, she made her solitary way amid the hawthorn glades of the Park,—“startling the slim deer,” yet scarcely crushing the thymy tufts by her light footsteps. “No ! I certainly do not love him as I ought. When his arrival is announced, I feel none of that flutter of spirits with which I have seen my cousin Caroline welcome my brother ; I am moved neither to smiles nor tears by his approach or departure ; I would rather walk with either of my brothers ; my spirits appear checked and embarrassed by Lord Willersdale’s presence ; and all the tumult of bridal preparation, which seems to enchant the rest of the family, serves only to depress and overwhelm my heart. Surely these feelings—both the present and the absent ones—por-

tend no good. Surely I ought to explain them *to him*. Yet in what terms?—His reserve of manner appears to render any thing resembling confidence, importunate; amid the matter-of-fact business of life, he would regard these girlish scruples as frivolous. Besides, from the moment he begins to allude, however remotely, to our marriage, the words I had prepared in explanation die within my lips; and mamma's assurances that any discussion of the subject on my part might appear indelicate, render me dumb. Well—the affair is settled; and heaven knows with but little interference of mine. The affair is settled,—the *trousseau* finished,—packed up to be dispatched to my new home;—the wedding-party invited,—the settlements signed;—alas! alas! it is too late to retract. I should never take courage to show myself so inconsistent!" *more stupid you*

And by such idle arguments the eventual happiness of two estimable individuals was trifled away!

Helen Mordaunt was just eighteen years of age, when she attracted the attention of Lord Willersdale. I am inclined to commence the definition of my heroine by her years, rather than by her qualifications; because to these was owing her chief merit in her lover's estimation. He had been invited to pass the Christmas holidays at Fern Wood, the seat of Sir Herbert Gray, who was the husband of one of Helen's elder sisters; and although his mind was sufficiently engrossed by the peremptory duties of Downing Street, and by the anxiety of the coming sessions, he had leisure to note in the course of Lady Gray's first tedious dinner, that near the master of the house,—uncared for, and patient, and silent,—sat a tall, timid, and very beautiful girl, who replied to all accidental interrogations, by a blush and a monosyllable; two incidents of rare occurrence under his London observation.

Lord Willersdale, although he had recently entered his forty-first year, was still sufficiently

attractive in appearance to justify the *empressement* with which he was unremittingly pursued by all the dowagers of London—either for themselves or their daughters—even had he not been in possession of an ancient barony, twenty thousand a-year, and a seat in the Cabinet. But blest with such an aggregation of good gifts, his *air distingué* became of secondary moment; and was scarcely ever recorded among the advantages which rendered feminine monosyllables rare in his ears, and female blushes equivocal in his eyes. He had been hunted through the balls of fifteen seasons; exposed to the rheumatisms of countless water parties; he had been talked at, and to, and of, by divers matrimonial speculators, and all the accomplishments of all the muses had been levelled at his heart. But the desperate boldness of these attacks had ever forewarned him to elevate the shield of caution in self-defence, till he had become hardened by long habits of resistance. When lo! just as the most experienced mammas

about town had pronounced him to be “not a marrying man”—“a mere politician”—and “only fit for a dinner acquaintance,” Lord Willersdale’s obdurate heart was won in the progress of half a cutlet, by a “Yes—I believe so,” uttered with the sweetest intonation in the world, aided by a rising blush, whose transparent and instantaneous lustre illuminated one of the loveliest countenances he had ever beheld. It is clear that Helen’s unpractised timidity was the consequence of her tender age; and it is therefore proved, that her eighteen years formed the qualification attracting the approval of her new lover.

In the course of the evening Lord Willersdale contrived to obtain a personal introduction to Miss Mordaunt; and as the assiduity with which he assisted her to turn the leaves of a morocco portfolio—filled with yellow sunsets from the Rhine, and cobalt skies from Switzerland—had something of the air of paternal protection, the “unmarrying man” succeeded in procuring an

increase of dialogue, and a diminution of blush from his unpractised companion. In the teeth of an east wind, he managed to beguile her into a shrubbery-walk on the morrow; to excite her curiosity touching the village skaiters on some distant pond, on the succeeding day. Sometimes an exotic was in flower in one of the greenhouses; sometimes there was a wonderful folio of prints, immoveable from a very solitary old-fashioned library; and Helen, who had only enjoyed six months' emancipation from the school-room, could scarcely sufficiently congratulate herself upon Lord Willersdale's good-natured partiality, which rendered her stay at Fern Wood so much less tedious and formal than she had expected. "He was infinitely more kind and attentive to her wishes," she said, "than even papa."

The first week in January brought a deep snow; and a deep snow, with a large party, a rambling country-house, a billiard-table, and a deserted book-room, does more towards the pro-

gress of an incipient love affair, than fifty balls at Almack's or Devonshire House. Before the close of the holidays, Lord Willersdale had ceased to resist the influence which youth and beauty began for the first time to acquire over his better judgment; and he became so anxious to restrict his colloquial intercourse with the amazed Helen once more within monosyllabic limits, that her former blushes returned in full force; and she was obliged to refer his eager solicitations to that papa, whose affection had been so long quoted as a standard of comparison with his own.

“My dear Helen!” exclaimed the pompous Sir Stephen Mordaunt, leading his daughter with an air of the most gracious paternity into the identical library which had been forced into the confidence of the whole affair; “my dear Helen! I am happy to offer you my congratulations on your good fortune; a good fortune, suffer me to say, which far exceeds even that of your elder sisters. My solicitor has fre-

quently mentioned to me that Lord Willersdale's estates in my own county are likely to render *his* the preponderating interest in case of our dear duke's death, previous to the next dissolution;—an interest which might at any time command an earldom !”

Miss Mordaunt filled up the pause by a bewildered bow of assent;— and with an air of importance and good information, Sir Stephen now subsided into a confidential whisper.

“ The late Lady Willersdale, my dear, was said to have the finest jewels at the court of the late king. She was always remarkably well received,—a great favourite of Queen Charlotte, who had so few favourites. Our dear lord, too, has never been lost sight of. My dear Helen ! how fortunate that I resolved on putting your brother William in the church ! —Next to the Chancellor's, there is no patronage like Lord Willersdale's ;—we are really too fortunate !”

“ While you appear so well pleased, I scarcely

like to damp your expectations ; but I assure you, papa, I have already explained to Lord Willersdale the great improbability of my ever meeting his feelings as I could wish."

"His feelings, my dear!—his lordship's feelings, are those of a most gentlemanlike and reasonable man. He is aware that at your age, and educated as you have been, no person can have presumed to seek your preference. He is conscious and proud of having been the first to ask your hand in marriage of your parents ; and they, Miss Mordaunt, are no less proud of having it in their power to bestow."

"But, dear Sir,—surely you do not intend me to accept the proposals of a man I hardly know ; and at my age—without any acquaintance with society to guide my choice, how can I tell whether I love him sufficiently to make him my husband. Oh ! my dear papa!—surely—surely—you have not already accepted his offers !"

"I confess myself to have been too wholly

unprepared for a scene of this kind, to have treated Lord Willersdale with the disrespect of an indefinite answer; nor can I imagine any thing more indelicate than the mind of a young lady, who considers passion a necessary guide in her choice of an alliance. Your sisters, Miss Mordaunt, never favoured me with a Missish confidence of this kind; nor will *you*, I trust, on any future occasion. You have hitherto affected so warm an interest in the fortunes of your family, that I had flattered myself of being secure of your acquiescence. But enough has been said on this distressing subject. What further you may have to communicate must pass to my knowledge through the interposition of your excellent mother; who, I can venture to assert, will feel equally astonished with myself by your most inexplicable conduct."

With a sense of shame more acutely felt than accurately developed, Helen withdrew from the presence of her irate sire; but the

scene she had to encounter in Lady Mordaunt's dressing-room was of a yet more distressing character.

“ I will not, for your sake, my dear, believe that you are serious in declining proposals so advantageous as those of Lord Willersdale,” calmly observed the stiff-necked Lady Mordaunt, filipping the dust from a gown of gros de Naples, as substantial and unyielding as herself; “ you cannot be so blind to your duty towards your numerous connexions, or so careless of your own interests. Your father's estate had many embarrassments when it came into his hands; and he has been harassed by a large and expensive family. There have been your brother Walter's two elections,—and William's debts paid thrice since he left Oxford;—besides John's commissions, the fortunes of your elder sisters, and the expensive education of your younger ones, to increase Sir Robert's difficulties. You have, therefore, very little prospect of being in town next season; your

dear father's health is precarious; and it remains for you to decide how you will like to share the pittance, and the uncertain destiny of myself, and my large and ill-provided family, when his death drives us from Mordaunt Park into comparative obscurity."

"I trust, my dear mother, that you would not find me much of an additional burden; and in the affections of my nearest relatives——"

"Do not cant about affection, Helen, while you are bent upon marking, by your selfish indulgence of a girlish caprice, a total indifference to the welfare of all those who are most tender in their attachment towards yourself."

"Nay, dear mamma——"

"I have no time, child, to listen to any sentimental ecstasies. The first dinner-bell has rung,—pray go and make yourself fit to be seen."

Unfortunately this maternal command was somewhat difficult of execution. In spite of

cold water, and *eau de Cologne*, Miss Mor-daunt arrived at the drawing-room door with her eyes of a deeper tinge than her coral necklace; and it was really a relief to her when Lord Willersdale, calmly drawing her arm within his own, led her towards the dinner-table; whispering, as they traversed the hall, such kind, and encouraging, and fatherly words of consolation, that the tears sprang anew into her eyes.

“I should be so deeply grieved,” he murmured, “could I suppose that any one had presumed to annoy you on my account,—I should so truly repent the precipitancy of my addresses, and reproach myself with being even a momentary cause of sorrow to one whom I wish to spare all future distress, that I implore you with the earnestness of a friend to assume a more cheerful aspect. I will leave this place to-morrow,” said he, slightly pressing her arm, “if my stay here subjects you to any solicitation or interference that gives you pain. Only say the word, and I will go.”

Helen did *not* say the word. Nay, she was so feelingly touched in the course of the evening, by the soothing kindness and considerate delicacy of her admirer; she became so suddenly and powerfully conscious of the charm of being a first and sole object of interest to a man of sense and moral excellence, that a prodigious proportion of her objections became extinguished. Long before the dissolution of the frost, and the Fern-wood party, she had pronounced the monosyllable so insisted on by her friends at large, and so fondly coveted by Willersdale himself. The marriage proceeded by slow degrees through its progressive stages, duties, and ceremonies; and notwithstanding all the misgivings of her heart, and all the disquietudes which became added to its oppression, she confirmed her assent, for better and for worse, by a vow of mightiest solemnity, pronounced in the chapel of Mordaunt Hall in the course of the month of March.

And thus Sir Stephen and Lady Mordaunt

had the gratification of expelling their lovely daughter from her home, in order to secure "a good match" in their family; while one of the most estimable and distinguished members of London society provided himself with the blessing of a reluctant and ill-assorted bride;—two first, but important steps upon the path of misfortune for both parties.

CHAPTER II.

“ At eighteen,
She had consented to create again
That Adam called ‘ the happiest of men.’ ”

Byron.

LADY WILLERSDALE had been so little accustomed to find the timid reserve of her nature thawed by the efforts of her own family, she had been so rarely pressed by affectionate interrogation, or required by the interest of those around her to render an account of her thoughts and feelings and actions, that the fervour of tenderness with which her lord attempted to win upon her confidence, during the early days of their domestication in his villa on the banks of the Thames, caused her to shrink with re-

doubled timidity from his advances. She had been hitherto regarded as a piece of mechanism, fashioned by the skill of the governess, and set in motion by the authority of her parents; and the intense interest with which her husband laboured to develope its principles of action, to ascertain the combination of springs and wheels by which its movements were secretly prompted, struck her rather with alarm than gratitude. She believed his curiosity to arise from doubts of her worthiness;—that, conscious of her deficient powers and imperfect education, he was bent upon ascertaining the full extent of her incapacity to become the friend and companion of his future years; in order that he might not too deeply engage his hopes of happiness in domestic life, or that he might perhaps look elsewhere for consolation. She sought refuge therefore from his investigation in increased reserve; and the silence which she imposed upon her lips naturally assumed the character of cold, if not sullen indifference.

“ If I mark too strong an interest in this beautiful villa,” thought Helen, “ he will think me interested ;—if I acknowledge how much I am delighted by these exquisite conservatories—this aviary—he will be shocked by my childishness. I dare not tell him with what intensity of enjoyment I have been devouring the poetry of Scott and Wordsworth ;—he would despise the ignorance which has left their works a novelty to my mind ; or perhaps imagine that I wish to captivate him by the affectation of a taste I do not possess.—No ! I will leave him to find out, by time and patience, the humility and sincerity with which I am desirous of meriting his good opinion, and justifying his rash choice. Pray Heaven it be not already secretly repented !”

The bridegroom, meanwhile, grieved and surprised by Helen’s increasing reserve, oppressed by the renewed remembrance of her original reluctance, and apprehensive that the gravity of his address and character had chilled that genial flow of confidence which is the ordi-

nary characteristic of a young and ingenuous mind, began to form suspicions the most painful and perplexing. He believed her unhappy ; and naturally busied himself with conjectures touching the origin of her affliction. Perhaps she loved another :—perhaps she had too late discovered in himself a character incompatible with her own ;—perhaps her disposition, her temper, were of a gloomy turn,—But no ! a thousand incidents served to assure him that it was only in his presence, or in her relations with himself, that Helen became grave and abstracted.

More than once, his unobserved entrance into the music-room had rendered him an auditor of strains, whose wild and joyous animation could only have burst from the fulness of a cheerful heart,—of a mind at ease. More than once his premature return to the villa had detected Lady Willersdale bounding through the secluded shrubberies with the sportive gladness of a child. He had found her danc-

ing to her own wild music in the loneliness of her splendid apartment; he had heard her indulge in the involuntary merriment of youth, over a scene of Scribe, or of Miss Austin's novels. But on his acknowledged approach, her smiles, her song, her dance, were instantly subdued into the most frigid propriety of demeanour; and blushing for her detected folly, she would assume a redoubled solemnity of look and gesture. A person of her own age would have readily detected the imposture, and laughed her back into sincerity; but the anxious observation of Lord Willersdale was directed rather to the origin and motives of the change—of the *deception*,—than to its forestalment. Nay, he would have judged it beneath him to startle her into confidence, or surprise her affections;—like herself, he trusted to time for the establishment of a better understanding between them. “If I refrain from drawing the matrimonial chain too closely at this early period,”

thought the disconcerted Willersdale, "Helen will never learn to regard it as a badge of slavery; and if I do not terrify her into aversion by the unwelcome ardour of a lover, she may perhaps learn to love me as an indulgent friend and companion."

A tone of mutual dissimulation thus established between them, the seclusion of their domestic existence soon became irksome to both; and both were equally anxious to shake off the consciousness of restraint, by rushing into the enfranchisement of a crowd. Helen, in spite of her innate preference for the peace of a country life, began to affect a vehement interest in the novel gaieties of the metropolis; and Lord Willersdale, trusting that the society of those of her own sex and age might serve to dissipate her reserve, or perhaps to increase her happiness, seized the first pretext to propose their removal to Hamilton Place.

"I fear I have been wanted in London," he observed one evening to his friend Sir Ralph

Harberton, who had ridden down uninvited to dine with the new-married couple ; and who was astonished to find how little the *nonchalance* and serenity of their mutual demeanour would justify the stock of biting jests which he had prepared for an uxorious honeymoon ;—“ I fear I must have been wanted in Downing Street, and that I have encroached on the Duke’s indulgence by my prolonged absence. I have been away nearly five weeks ; but we shall establish ourselves in town early in the week—and then to business !”

“ With what appetite you may,” rejoined Sir Ralph, with a glance of implication towards the young and beautiful bride. “ The rides, and drives, and walks round this interesting spot, must have rendered the toils and the slavery of office somewhat distasteful.”

“ On the contrary,” replied Lord Willersdale, “ my recent *désœuvrement* has rather tended to augment the value of employment. No one can properly appreciate the pleasure of

mounting a favourite horse at five o'clock on a fine summer afternoon, till he has been chained to a desk, suffocated in a heated atmosphere, and bewildered by the prosings of the unintelligent, or thwarted by the grumblings of the discontented, during six or eight previous hours. To proceed from pleasure to pleasure, invalidates both; we forfeit equally the eagerness of hope, and the pleasures of memory."

"Lady Willersdale has to thank you for the insinuation that you are desirous of becoming officially bored into a due appreciation of her society."

"At this early period of the year," observed Helen, colouring deeply, and avoiding all notice of Sir Ralph's sarcasm, "the country boasts of few pleasures to pall upon the taste. We have no flowers at present but those raised by artificial means; there is no shade in the woods, and no freshness in the turf to make riding particularly agreeable; and we are too near London, too surrounded by petty proprie-

torship and brick walls, to admit of a good gallop."

Lord Willersdale, who had accompanied his bride through some of the green alleys of Richmond Park, and who had heard her express, on more than one occasion, her admiration and enjoyment of the scene, felt vexed and disappointed by this declaration.

"I trust you will learn to content yourself with the turf of Hyde Park," said Sir Ralph; "the shores of the Serpentine afford attraction to many a fair equestrian; and we shall hail with delight such an acquisition to our riding parties."

"I am looking forward with the greatest interest to my season in town," replied Helen with affected rapture. "My rusticity has given to every diversion the charm of novelty; for excepting a few months which I passed in Grosvenor Square last year, with my sister, Lady Lilfield, I confess myself shamefully unaccustomed to the habits of a London life."

“ *Du courage !*” said Harberton, with an air of patronizing commiseration. “ With so excellent a cicerone as Willersdale, your ladyship cannot fail to be quickly initiated. Willersdale is *au fait* to every duty, from those of the boudoir to those of a cabinet council. He has served his time as a critic in White’s window, and as an umpire in the secret committee at Almack’s; the Duchess never has her poodle shaved without reference to his judgment, touching the frontier-line of demarcation between curls and tonsured nakedness;—and as to Lady Sophia—eh ! Willersdale?—but I beg your pardon,—I am forgetting that you are now a married man *de par l’église*.”

Helen affected a laugh to conceal her embarrassment ; and her husband was grieved to perceive her unusual gaiety excited by such flippant *persiflage*. It was on her own mind, however, and through an influence any thing but pleasing to her feelings, that Sir Ralph Harberton’s vague and frivolous insinuations produced their

most pernicious effect. If Lord Willersdale were indeed thus *répandu* in female society, thus versed in its fashions, and devoted to its influence, how unpleasing must her rustic ignorance appear in his eyes; how wholly unworthy would he find her, on a more intimate acquaintance, of fulfilling his *beau idéal* of womanly perfection; how despairingly would he fly from the disgusts of his domestic circle! Dismayed by such a prospect, she shuddered!—and again, and yet more closely, shrouded her imaginary defects from detection, under an impenetrable armour of reserve!

And thus, even previous to the establishment of the bride and bridegroom in their London home, a veil of misunderstanding had interposed itself between them. It is true, that the slightest word, the faintest gesture on either part, might have rent it asunder; but experience proves that many of the most trivial vicissitudes of common domestic life, are as powerful in their influence, and apparently as uncontrollable by

the agency of those most interested in the events, as the magic incidents of a fairy tale.

Fling but a stone—the giant dies !

is a line indiscriminately applied to the nightmare and the spleen. But it is the immobility of the sufferer which originates his pain ;—and it is the wilful blindness of the sensitive which forms the peril and the misery of their self-delusions.

It would be difficult to imagine any thing in the shape of domestic arrangement more delicately and perfectly organized than the establishment of Lord Willersdale. Its bachelor precision imparted the airy elegance of a country-house, to a mansion of the utmost splendour and highest appointments ; and in honour of the change in his condition, the exquisite taste of its owner had been exerted to convert the *suite* appropriated to Helen's peculiar use, into a labyrinth of *virtù* and magnificence. Now his lordship, although as proudly above the sordid details and minutiae of vulgar life as

became his position in the world, was sufficiently mortal to have busied himself with eager interest in the choice and appropriation of every object devoted to the use of his bride;—his fancy had directed their arrangement, his lavish generosity had incited the efforts of his agents. But how was Helen to dream of this affectionate condescension?—how to imagine the pains and the time he had devoted to the supposed gratifications of her fancy?—Believing the silken hangings and footcloths of velvet to be co-existent with the house itself—satisfied that the vases of Sèvres or Dresden, the *bijouterie* of or-moulu, and malachite, and mother-of-pearl, had courted the London dust in the very position they actually occupied, since the days of the late Lady Willersdale—Helen gazed around upon her new treasures with her usual dispirited and callous air. Nay! she would have believed it to be a compromise of her matronly dignity in the eyes of her husband, had she evinced the smallest interest in details so puerile in his esti-

mation. In vain he looked for one rewarding smile ; in vain he listened for one expression of satisfaction at the aspect of her new abode. Lady Willersdale threw herself as listlessly upon the Persian divan of her fairy boudoir, as if she had made it the stronghold of her *ennui* for years ; and while the fountain of her miniature conservatory murmured, and its clocks chimed to unseen music, she appeared lost in a reverie of discontented retrospection.

But if Helen's indifference towards one department of her bridal acquisitions was destined to disappoint and wound the self-love of Lord Willersdale, her enthusiasm on another point proved still more dissatisfactory to his mind. On leading her into the dressing-room, so gorgeously prepared for her reception, he took occasion to point out to her notice the jewel-casket which his somewhat precipitate nuptials had prevented from completion previous to the ceremony ; and a suit of diamonds was displayed to her view, in which

Rundell had done his best for the advantage of a collection of gems of unequalled beauty. The remembrance of the honourable mention bestowed by her father upon this distinguished possession of the house of Willersdale, brought a melancholy smile into the countenance of the bride; but having rightly conjectured that her preceding coldness of observation and acceptance might have appeared ungrateful towards her husband, she suddenly burst forth into an enthusiasm of applause and delight, which could be interpreted into nothing better than the expression and idle triumph of a selfish, personal vanity!

Lord Willersdale sighed deeply as he closed the emblazoned lid of the casket upon its glittering treasures; and he sighed again, and still more deeply, when, on the following morning, Séguin waited upon him with a ground plan of the Opera, to point out the boxes still vacant for her ladyship's selection;—for the occasion called forth a renewal of her raptures. Per-

suaded that she had given offence by her ostensible indifference to the appointment of her new *ménage*, she once more attempted to balance the defect, by an over-vehement interest in the next object of personal enjoyment that presented itself; and unfortunately it chanced to be one which involved a point of her character yet undetermined in Willersdale's estimation. He was still doubtful whether the admiration of the world might not acquire a fatal importance in the eyes of one so young, so lovely, so inexperienced; and Helen, by her warm expression of anxiety to procure the best possible operabox, and to inhabit it on the shortest possible notice, unadvisedly assumed the tone of a practised votary of fashionable folly.

The gravity with which he gazed upon her sparkling eyes and flushed cheek, instantly convinced her of her error. "I shall never learn to please him," she thought, as she turned despairingly from the contemplation of his clouded brow. "Yesterday I appeared too careless;

—to-day I am too animated. No! I shall never learn the art of pleasing a person so fastidious. I shall always incur the risk of woundings which are totally incomprehensible to mine.”

Lady Willersdale returned to the breakfast-table, where Monsieur Séguin’s reiterated obeisances appeared to reprove her indecision. “Will you adjust this weighty matter for me?” said she, gently addressing her husband. “You are aware of my ignorance on such points, and——”

But Lord Willersdale interrupting a confession which he was not particularly desirous to receive in the presence of so distinguished a servant of the public as the official functionary of the King’s Theatre, hastily bowed Monsieur Séguin out of the room. “I should advise you, my dear Lady Willersdale,” said he, coldly, “to suspend your decision about this box, if it be not indispensable to your immediate happiness, till you have consulted my sister, Lady Danvers. In all points of fashion, etiquette, or

convenance, her knowledge of society, and tact, and experience, will be your best direction;—even in the seclusion of Mordaunt Park, I doubt not you have heard her named as one of the most popular and influential persons of the day. She has been a Patroness for many years; at Paris, *elle fait fureur*—as you ladies say; and indeed, I know no one who is so distinguished in her air and address, or whose establishment is so well *monté* as her's."

"I have heard Lady Danvers' parties spoken of as the best in town."

"She is certainly peculiarly happy in her manner of reception. The society at Danvers' House is formed of the *élite* of London; but conscious that rank and fashion *alone* are leaden materials for a coterie, my sister has contrived, by a judicious admixture of artists and men of letters,—wits and foreigners,—to leaven the mass into a most ethereal lightness. She has a peculiar gift of selection;—*personne ne sait mieux assortir son monde*."

“ By your mode of approval, I perceive that there is a science of fashion, an art of hospitality to be acquired in London. Alas ! how inconvenient, and how disgraceful will my ignorance appear in the eyes of your friends,—nay, even in your own. I shall begin to dread the sight of a guest.”

“ At present, my dear Helen, there will be no occasion for our receiving much society in our own house. To relieve your embarrassment, it will be better that you should grow accustomed to the confusion of a crowd, without the trouble and responsibility of playing the hostess. In my public situation of life, however, it is absolutely necessary that we should not appear to recede from the pleasures of society. We owe something to the world ; and the world, if cheated of its due, will make its murmurs heard. You will, I am persuaded, permit me to point out to your notice, in the first instance, the society by which I wish to see you surrounded ; your own natural elegance,

the peculiar grace of your demeanour, will attract, and fix, and fascinate to your side, all those who are deserving of your attention. In a few months the art of representation will become familiar to you, for all women have an instinctive aptitude for its acquirement ; and I shall soon hear you laughing at the remembrance of your present timidity, and playing your part in the *beau monde*—perhaps only too well.”

Helen affected not to disclaim the compliment ; for she was hastening to the solitude of her boudoir, in order to muse in silence over her opening prospects. She was chilled by the tone of admonition assumed by Lord Willersdale, even while she desired to seek and profit by his counsels. To a very young mind, a lesson is always a lesson, even from the lips it loves ;—implying superiority, it proves a serious impediment to the flow and confidence of affection ; which, like the current of a river, runs smoothly only over level ground. “ The art ”—

“the science”—“the tact”—“the *convenances* of society,” had already become watchwords of dismay to the ears of the gentle Helen. The horrors of her juvenile education seemed about to begin anew, and for no good or sufficient purpose. All around her was cold and artificial; and she found *herself* required to become cold and artificial too.

The next time Lady Willersdale cast her eyes upon the diamond necklace, and the wardrobes gleaming with white satin,—it was with a sensation of loathing!

CHAPTER III.

Bright as a star, she hovers in the skies,
Dazzling the soul whose gaze she wins to Heaven ;
And many a human fault might be forgiven,
At the soft pleading of those gentle eyes.—*Vane.*

WERE any person entering a theatre for the first time, to find himself introduced behind the scenes, rather than into the area of audience, he would be at once deprived of all the pleasures arising from dramatic illusion. He would be impressed by the coarseness of the bedaubed scenery—by the laborious efforts of the machinery—by the tinselled frippery of the dresses and decorations—by the hollowness and superficiality of the whole affair ; and disgust would

seal his perceptions against its better attributes. And thus it was with Lady Willersdale.

During the short period of her maturity, the world—the *beau monde*—had been spoken of in her hearing, by her father, and mother, and elder sisters, as a matter of sordid speculation ; or rather as a place of public amusement, to secure a good situation in which, young ladies were born and educated. For this alone they were to draw or dance,—to sing, or ride, or bathe,—to wear green veils, or trim their ringlets ;—and their success, like virtue, was to be its own reward. Helen felt the indelicacy, the error, the wickedness of such opinions ; but she heard them instilled into her mind by her nearest and dearest,—and was silent !

She married ;—and the husband to whom a happy destiny apportioned her hand ; was a man rich in the general favour of the nation ;—wise, good, religious, honourable. Yet his first lessons to her inexperience shared rather the wisdom of the serpent, than the guilelessness of the dove.

He spoke to her of the opinion of the world, of the suffrage of society, as of a prize alone worthy to incite her efforts. He too, seemed to regard the surface of things as all in all; he too described the factitious atmosphere of fashionable life as the only breath worthy of sustaining existence; he too appeared to dread the clamours of the distinguished and ermined mob, as a fiat of awful condemnation!—Abashed and overpowered, Lady Willersdale almost longed to return to the monotonous seclusion of Mordaunt Park, in order to escape the responsibility of her present position. All the imaginary charms, all the coveted gaieties of London vanished from her hopes. She thought only of the part she was about to play, and of the accurate critic under whose observation it must be performed;—and above all, of the terrible Lady Danvers,—the *élégante par excellence*,—the sublime and beautiful of thrice-refined *ton*,—who was about to overwhelm her by a supererogation of fashion, and wit, and address, and high-breeding;—who

was to be the tyrannical duenna, in short, of her splendid slavery.

Now of this selfsame Lady Danvers, it chanced that, previous to her acquaintance with Lord Willersdale, she had preconceived an opinion very different from his own. It has often been observed, both in books and in common parlance, that the characters of people of the world are least accurately developed by their own immediate family : for who would presume to insinuate to a father or a husband, to a sister or a daughter, in what degree the honour of their name may have been tarnished by the vice or folly of their nearest relatives, who have perhaps screened themselves from inquiry under the shadow of so close a connexion?—Who can boast the courage requisite to rend asunder the hallowed bond of family unity—to sever the tie made holy by the sanction of Heaven and which the labour of the whole earth might vainly attempt to reunite!—Lord Willersdale, in vaunting to his pure and innocent bride the

merits and qualifications of his favourite sister, had uttered the full extent of his own opinion and knowledge; but much yet remained untold, of which he was wholly ignorant;—many a scandalous insinuation was floating upon the public breath of rumour, which had reached all ears but his. He saw his sister caressed and fêted by the world—worshipped as a golden idol of fashion—courted by the virtuous mothers of virtuous daughters,—and how could he imagine that any latent evil lurked behind such fair appearances?—But it was not thus with his bride. Brief as had been Helen's participation in the pains and pleasures of a London life, she had accidentally chanced upon a somewhat nearer insight into Lady Danvers's true character than might have been expected.

Lady Lilfield,—the sister under whose protection she had been introduced into society during the few months of her former residence in town,—was ten years older than herself, and stood towards her altogether in a maternal light.

Lady Lilfield was a thoroughly worldly woman,—a worthy scion of the Mordaunt stock. She had professedly accepted the hand of Sir Robert, because a connexion with him was the best that happened to present itself in the first year of her *début*,—the “best match” to be had at a season’s warning! She knew that she had been brought out with the view to dancing at a certain number of balls, refusing a certain number of good offers, and accepting a better one, somewhere between the months of January and June; and she regarded it as a propitious dispensation of providence to her parents and to herself, that the comparative proved a superlative—even a high sheriff of the county, a baronet of respectable date, with ten thousand a year! She felt that her duty towards *herself* necessitated an immediate acceptance of the dullest “good sort of man” extant throughout the three kingdoms; and the whole routine of her after life was regulated by the same rigid code of moral selfishness. She was penetrated with a

most exact sense of what was due to her position in the world; but she was equally precise in her appreciation of all that, in her turn, she owed to society, nor from her youth upwards,

Content to dwell in decencies for ever—

had she been detected in the slightest infraction of these minor social duties. She knew with the utmost accuracy of domestic arithmetic—to the fraction of a course or an *entrée*—the number of dinners which Beech Park was indebted to its neighbourhood—the complement of laundry-maids indispensable to the maintenance of its county dignity—the aggregate of pines by which it must retain its horticultural precedence. She had never retarded by a day or an hour, the arrival of the family coach in Grosvenor-square, at the exact moment creditable to Sir Robert's senatorial punctuality; nor procrastinated by half a second the simultaneous bobs of her ostentatious Sunday-school, as she sailed majestically along the aisle towards her tall, stately, pharisaical, squire-

archical pew. True to the execution of her tasks—and her whole life was but one laborious task—true and exact as the great bell of the Beech Park turret clock, she was enchanted with the monotonous music of her own cold, iron tongue;—proclaiming herself the best of wives and mothers, because Sir Robert's rent-roll could afford to command the services of a first-rate steward, and butler and housekeeper, and thus insure a well ordered household; and because her seven substantial children were duly drilled through a daily portion of rice-pudding, and spelling-book, and an annual distribution of mumps and measles! All went well at Beech Park; for Lady Lilfield was the “excellent wife,” of “a good sort of man!”

So bright an example of domestic merit—and what country neighbourhood cannot boast of its duplicate?—was naturally superior to seeking its pleasures in the vapid and varying novelties of modern fashion. The habits of Beech Park still affected the dignified and

primeval purity of the departed century. Lady Lilfield remained true to her annual eight rural months of the county of Durham; against whose claims Kemp Town pleaded, and Spa and Baden bubbled in vain. During her pastoral seclusion, by a careful distribution of her stores of gossiping, she contrived to prose, in undetected tautology, to successive detachments of an extensive neighbourhood, concerning her London importance—her court dress—her dinner parties—and her refusal to visit the Duchess of ——; while, during the reign of her London importance, she made it equally her duty to bore her select visiting list with the history of the new Beech-Park School House—of the Beech-Park double dahlias—and of the Beech-Park privilege of uniting, in an aristocratic dinner party, the abhorrent heads of the rival political factions—the *Bianchi e Neri*—the houses of Montague and Capulet of the County Palatine of Durham. By such minute sections of the wide chapter of colloquial boredom, Lady

Lilfield acquired the character of being a very charming woman, throughout her respectable clan of dinner-giving baronets and their wives ; but the reputation of a very miracle of prosi-ness, among those

Men of the world, who know the world like men.

She was but a weed in the nobler field of society.

Now it may be readily imagined that in the select coterie of Lady Lilfield, arrayed as it was in all the ancient armour of self-important prejudices, the character of a Lady Danvers became subjected to an ordeal of no very mild probation. Unmollified by that sweetest influence of Christian charity, which “thinketh no evil,” and imagineth no guile, the Lilfieldians, in the coffee-hour of their seclusion after dinner—that hour so rashly conceded to the feminine conspiracy by the males of England—were accustomed to place the hapless object of their delicate investigations, under

the strong light of a false position; thus forcing its imperfections into notice, and distorting its better characteristics by the effect of an unnatural focus. Imagining all women to be actuated by their own motives of action, and scorning to judge a thing by its immediate pretensions, they proceeded to arraign Lady Danvers and her frivolous sisterhood, after the arbitrary canons of their own narrow code; and to find them guilty, without the intervention of counsel or of jury.

“There is but one great distinction of right or wrong, my dear Mrs. Beaumont,” observed the sententious hostess one evening, when the dress worn by Lady Danvers, at Prince Leopold’s concert on the preceding night, was brought under discussion; “and nothing will persuade me that Lady Danvers can be justified in flying about from party to party, and ball to ball, while her old lord remains at home, tête à tête with his gout.”

“True indeed, dear Lady Lilfield; a me-

lancholy instance of perversion ; but then—but then, are we not mistaken in judging so fashionable a person by the same rules of conduct we apply to our unpretending insignificant selves ? You and I, my dear, can be spared from the gay world, to smooth the pillow of a sick husband ; but there would be an insurrection at Almack's, if Lady Danvers were missed from a single ball.”

“ To tell you the truth,” whispered Lady Lilfield, creeping nearer to her friend over the cold, smooth, glazed holland of her hard and well covered sofa, “ to tell you the truth, I fancy we are still far from the root of the matter. The fact is, that society becomes a sort of necessary dram to persons whose moral constitutions are undermined by early dissipation ; their exhausted feelings have no sensation left for the mere humdrum pleasures of domestic experience, such as poor tame creatures like you and I, my dear Mrs. Beaumont, are satisfied to appreciate.”

“ Why, I fancy that poor dear Lady Danvers’s younger years may have left something of a thorn sticking in her conscience. Unless I am much misled, its voice must often make itself heard, in spite of all the drums of all the orchestras in London.”

“ Very sensibly observed. But tell me, my dear Mrs. Beaumont, for you know *we* at Mordaunt Park, were never suffered to hear of such things—(Helen, my love! take your netting into the next room)—pray tell me, was any thing *serious* ever said about Lady Danvers?”

“ Why, that is exactly the sort of question one always finds so difficult to answer.”

“ My dear, with *me* you are as safe as with the privy council.”

“ Oh! my hesitation proceeds from any thing but caution; but you are aware, dearest Lady Lilfield, that *serious* is an indefinite word—it implies so much, and comprehends so little! The late Lady Willersdale, you know, was so great a favourite with the late queen—one of

those sycophantic women, my dear, who are born in lappets, and manage to make them a cloak to the iniquities of all their tribe—that her daughter, Lady Danvers, contrived to sail through the world under cover of her formal old mother’s hoop; otherwise, indeed—but there is no use in recurring to old scandals.”

“ My dear soul, you excite my curiosity ! Believe me, I turn away as carefully as yourself from a contemplation of the frailties of human nature: but really, Lady Danvers *does* sometimes provoke me. Her horse always surrounded in the park by all the boys in London—and such a mob of men crowding after her to the *écarté* table ! Tell me, dearest Mrs. Beaumont, how *could* Lady Willersdale’s daughter contrive to acquire such an equivocal reputation ?—How was it ? ”

“ Why, you see, my dear, there was always a great deal of levity about her—and all that sort of thing; and when she returned from Rome, a year or two after her marriage with

old Lord Danvers, every body shook their heads about her—and all that sort of thing; then, you know, she retired for several years to his castle in the bogs; and whenever I inquired after her from any one returning from Ireland, the answer was, that she was amusing herself very well; and we all know what *that* sort of thing means. A few years ago—I suppose when she grew tired of her Irish amusements, Lord Danvers was ordered to Spa; and one heard of her riding about every where with Prince Augustus of Prussia. Now I leave you to judge, my dear Lady Lilfield, what *that* sort of thing must end in! Her proceedings during the last few years, you have yourself been enabled to observe; sometimes yachting at Cowes—sometimes dragging her old lord in state to Doncaster—sometimes *en grande dame* at Windsor—and sometimes the idol of the *polissons* at Boyle Farm. Now, I beg you to determine whether all that sort of thing can be called *serious*.”

“ Terrible indeed !” replied Lady Lilfield, mournfully raising her hands. “ How strange, that a woman of family should be so totally indifferent to her reputation !”

It may be imagined that, in spite of her netting, and a removal of ten yards and a half from the scene of *les caquets du boudoir*, Miss Mordaunt found herself an auditress of the greater part of this interesting colloquy ; and although its insinuations—the italics of the dialogue—were wholly unintelligible to her inexperience, an instinctive tact assured her—and worldly wisdom confirms the hint—that the woman whose conduct can defy suspicion, is “ clad in complete steel ” against its influence. The mighty jury of society is too widely diffused to admit of *packing*, and its verdict is inevitably just. To use a poetical illustration, there is a hallowed atmosphere surrounding the form of Chastity, which causes the darts of Malice to fall innocuous to the earth. Wherever there is much blame, there is much error !

With these preconceptions operating upon her mind, prepared to dread her as a judge, and to avoid her as a councillor,—nay, perhaps to despise her as a woman, Lady Willersdale was summoned to receive the visit of her celebrated sister-in-law; and as she descended the great stair, leaning upon her husband's arm, she rejoiced that the splendours of her bridal attire were undiminished previous to her interview with a woman so devoted to the cares of the toilet. Notwithstanding the flattering reassurances of Lord Willersdale, and her own modest consciousness of worth, she blushed, and trembled, and hesitated, as she entered the room; a circumstance of momentous account in the eyes of Lady Danvers. Her ladyship had prepared herself for the self-importance of a triumphant country belle; or for the bold defiance of an aspiring rival: and Helen's gentle diffidence spoke volumes in her favour.

That gentle diffidence, however, became soothed into happy self-possession by the first

half dozen sentences uttered by her dreaded visitor. Of the most unmeaning order of common-place, and totally free from the professions of polite solicitude, Lady Danvers's observations were spoken in an accent of kindness, and with a natural grace of expression, which insinuated itself into the hearers heart. Peculiarly gifted with

The sort of air that sets you at your ease
Without implying your perplexities,

her address was fraught with a charm surpassing the influence of her beauty or her wit. In five minutes Helen congratulated herself on the acquisition of a most agreeable acquaintance; in fifteen, she fancied she had found a friend; and if, at the expiration of an hour her mind had been sufficiently disengaged to philosophise, she would perhaps have urged as a conclusive motive for marrying Lord Willersdale, that Lady Danvers was his sister.

“ I am sorry, my dear Lady Willersdale, that you have been troubled about an Opera

box ; for my brother should have known that I had retained a share of mine for your use. Engaged as he is with the duke, and your sisters absent from town this year, you will no doubt prefer being with a friend until you have formed your own arrangement. Perhaps you will dine with me, *sans façon*, and accompany me to-night ; for Willersdale informs me he must go down to the House, and do penance for his long holidays."

Lord Willersdale, anxious to cement the intimacy of his wife and sister, warmly sanctioned Helen's acceptance of this proposal ; and it was arranged that she should accompany Lady Danvers in her morning's drive, and dress at Danvers House. She felt elated by the prospect of escaping for a whole day the *gêne* and formality of a home too new to be any thing but irksome. There was a simplicity about her new sister's manner, and dress, and language, which afforded a welcome relief from Lord Willersdale's solemnity ; and she prepared her-

self in a moment to profit by her good-natured offer.

“By the way,” observed Lady Danvers, as they traversed together the splendid suite of apartments, “Willersdale informs me that you have been puzzling yourself with the mysteries of your visiting list, which is quite unnecessary. Vernon, your groom of the chambers, will settle all those arrangements better than you can; form your own friendships, your own *liaisons*, but leave your acquaintance in *his* hands,—it is his business to remind you whenever your personal interference is necessary. *D’ailleurs personne ne s’entend mieux au Manuel des etiquettes que ce cher Vernon.* He was formed by my late mother; who you know was born a maid of honour, and died a lady in waiting. Vernon!” she continued, as they reached the ante-room, “Lady Willersdale relies upon your diligence to see her cards properly distributed. You will afterwards make out your list for her selection of her morning acquaint-

ance. Remember that her ladyship's carriage meets her to night at my house ;—we sup after the opera.”

The obsequious Vernon bowed with the air of a Lord High Chamberlain ; and the two lovely sisters proceeded in their task of busy idleness. From Dévy to Triaud—from Kitchings to Storr's—from Mrs. Mee's *studio* to Andrews's study, they visited all the resorts of feminine *désœuvrement*.

“ For the future, these people will wait upon *you*, my dear Lady Willersdale,” observed her experienced cicerone ; “ but as you do not wish at present to be bored with visiting, they will serve to pass away our morning. I usually beguile my time in the exclusive society of a few particular friends, who leave me little leisure to *courir les boutiques* ; a diversion however, for which I have a womanly *foiblesse* ; *car*

Qui de son sexe n'a pas l'esprit,

De son sexe a tout le malheur !

CHAPTER IV.

J'ai soutenu mon interrogatoire !
 L'un, vous trainoit sa voix de pédagogue,
 L'autre brilloit d'un ton cas, d'un air rogue,
 Tandis qu'un autre avec un ton fluté
 Disait ' Mon fils—sachons la verité !'
 Moi, toujours ferme et toujours laconique
 Je rembarrais la troupe.—*Voltaire.*

“WHO in heaven's name was that beautiful creature to whom Harberton was talking last night in Lady Danvers's box ?” inquired Lord Barton of General Ross—a gossip established on the *pavé* for the last three generations—as they lounged together in the window of the most exclusive club in all St. James's Street.

“Who indeed !” for her anonymous charms set the house into a clamour of interrogation.

The *Who is shes* had pretty nearly hissed into silence Pasta's "Giorno d'orror."

"*Anonyme tant qu'il vous plaira*," observed young Melbourne, an *ex-attaché* of some distinction; "but depend on it, a *great* unknown! Harborton knows better than to commit himself by a public dialogue with any thing plebeian—any thing of equivocal *ton*."

"Sir Ralph Harborton *commit* himself by conversing with the intimate friend of Lady Danvers!" exclaimed Lord Barton, "For my part, I intend taking off my hat to him the first time we meet, in honour of his promotion."

"Now then is your time," rejoined the literal general; "for here he comes. Let us make him rise to explain."

"Harborton, my dear fellow," hastily inquired the *attaché*, "who was the fair creature under your patronage last night?"

"That beautiful woman in the diamond *bandeau*," added the general

“ Lady Danvers’s friend, Sir ?” asked Lord Barton.

“ What bets are depending ?” inquired Sir Ralph, in his turn ; astonished at their vehemence.

“ Not a guinea !”

“ Then I shall not diplomatize my good information. The *woman*—who chances to be a girl of eighteen—is our friend Willersdale’s rustic bride.”

“ Willersdale’s !—Willersdale’s !—Willersdale’s !” was reiterated on all sides, with twenty different inflexions of wonder, scorn, and implication.

“ Lord Willersdale—that mirror of prudence—married to a girl of eighteen !” exclaimed Henry Melbourne ; “ *par exemple, c’est trop fort.*”

“ Willersdale’s bride !” repeated the general with solemn deliberation ; “ his *daughter* you mean !”

“ His very legal and canonical wife.”

“Is the poor fellow demented?—*he*—the most domestic man on earth, whose heart is divided between his office and his fire-side; what madness could tempt him to trust his happiness in the hands of an inexperienced girl, who will go wild after Almack’s and the *galopade*!”

“That which has tempted many a *soi-disant* Angelo before him—one of the sweetest faces in the world! *Au reste,—il saura prendre son parti.* Lady Willersdale is at present as *naïve* as a squirrel in a wood,—very new—very unsophisticated; but Lord W. has saved himself a world of education, by placing her in the excellent training of the Danvers school.”

“I am much mistaken if Lady Willersdale put the lessons of her instructress to the proof. I never saw a countenance unite so much gentleness with so much intelligence; the most exquisite expression animates those beautiful features,” said Lord Barton.

“I do not remember having seen her face

before. *Cachée sous quelle herbe notre philosophe a-t-il trouvé sa violette ?*"

"Oh ! quite in the shade—in the land of the nonentities."

"Why surely, my dear Harberton," said General Ross, who was himself the son of an ex-minister's ex-steward, speaking with a look of the deepest concern, "*surely* a man in Willersdale's high situation, cannot have committed himself by a *roturier* alliance?"

"*Roturier !* repeated Lord Barton with contempt ;—"if Lady Willersdale's long slender throat, and open brow, and curved lip, be not distinctive of noble blood—Newmarket is superfluous."

"Oh ! as to mere blood, I believe the Mordaunts' runs clear from the conquest—a classical Norman stream, *mais en fait de ton, de position dans le monde*, her ancestors might as well have been cobblers. They are of the order of people who represent their county—roast oxen on attaining their majority—brew

ale when an heir is born,—come to town to attend Parliament and the Ancient Music—and having dozed respectably through life—dignify a post-obit paragraph in a county newspaper, and a mural tablet over the family pew, with a prosy inscription in very tough latin ! These Mordaunts have a swampy park, somewhere or other near one of the Cinque Ports ; and Willersdale, in his official capacity, was compelled to an annual endurance of their dinners *à la Glasse*. Whether or not he became *embêté* by the atmosphere of the marshes, I leave you to resolve ; but last winter he fell in love with one of old Mordaunt's daughters—playing I believe at battledore, or hunt the slipper—and before his nephews, or the Danvers's, or Lady Sophia could hear of his *accès de folie*, he had wooed, and won, and wedded his divinity.”

“ I am told he has furnished his house to outshine Holderness, or Devonshire. *Tant mieux pour nous.*”

“Mordaunt!” suddenly ejaculated old Sir Cæsar Meyrick, whose comments, like the frozen tones of Munchausen’s horn, generally made themselves heard as a sort of remote echo to an obsolete subject; “Mordaunt! is not that the name of the red-headed savage in the third Guards? Here! Seymour! Seymour! hav’nt you a Mordaunt in your regiment; a man who rides a thorough-bred bay horse.”

“I confess to the man and the horse;—both brutes are my intimate friends;—what are your commands to them?” replied a tall, handsome, indolent-looking man of about thirty-five, stretching himself over a well-worn copy of the Morning Post, which appeared to have hitherto engrossed his faculties.

“Is he brother to the new Lady Willersdale?”

“The horse is brother to Sir Peter, and sire of——”

“No—no! Captain Mordaunt——”

“Has as many sisters as Phaëton,—several

of them ladyships.—Mordaunt is on duty at Plymouth: I will write and ascertain any family fact you may consider historically important.”

Colonel Seymour took up his hat as he spoke, and was immediately joined by Lord Barton;—arm in arm they sauntered towards Pall Mall.

“ Surely, Seymour, I remember your going down with Mordaunt to hunt at his father’s. You *must* know Lady Willersdale?”

Seymour nodded.

“ And what is she?”

“ The most beautiful creature upon earth.”

“ And what more?”

“ ‘ A blank, my Lord,’ as Viola says.”

“ A blank worthy a thousand prizes I should imagine.”

“ *Ma foi je n’en sais rien.* When I condescended to make Mordaunt Park my hunting quarters, Helen was a pretty little girl, with the fear of the governess before her eyes; and al-

though those eyes were as blue and as soft as heaven, they did not tempt me from my principle of avoiding all dragonized Hesperides. Jack Mordaunt, who hated his sisters, used to *proner her* in distinction, as amiable and clever,—and I remember she was the only one of the family who never laughed at her elder brother's puns. And now I have honoured you with my *résumé* of Lady Willersdale's history, I beg to be favoured with yours."

"Mine shall be as terse as Ségur. She is the prettiest woman in London,—and I, the greatest fool."

"Consequently you have a tolerable prospect of falling in love. *Croyez moi n'en faites rien*. Even I, with all my temerity, should never adventure a passion for a bride."

"Believe me I did not suspect even your temerity—even your *vanity*, Seymour, of such folly. A libertine, as experienced as Don Juan, might be awed by the youthful purity of such a person as Lady Willersdale. *D'ailleurs* your

notions of love, and mine, lie in different hemispheres ; no ties, no duties, no principles, ever appear to form a barrier against your hopes ; while I, who am too poor to marry a wife of my own, and too old fashioned to devote myself to those of my friends, form my utmost happiness in niching some unapproachable idol in my heart,—just by way of keeping its worship holy.”

“ Very poetical indeed ! *My* feelings, I confess, are most prosaically matter-of-fact. And now, good bye,—for I shall go and leave my name with this marvellous ‘ Cynthia of the minute.’ ”

On the following morning, therefore, Lady Willersdale perceived an entry of “ Lieut.-Col. Seymour, Third Guards,” in her porter’s book : and among the numerous royal, noble, military and civil designations, whose visits it served to announce, that single name assumed the familiarity of former associations in her eyes. Among all the loungers whom her brothers of the Senate and the Guards had quartered at Mordaunt, to

shoot its pheasants, and eat its turkies during the holidays, Seymour was the only person whose superiority to the country squirearchy had forced itself on her notice. He had more than once approached the piano where the younger branches of the family were sentenced to a sort of professional exile from the society, in order to whisper many a gracious word in her ears, such as had reached them from no other quarter. She remembered how very dull the drawing-room appeared for some weeks after his return to town; and although Lord Willersdale's peculiarly dignified elegance of address had thoroughly obliterated the recollection of Colonel Seymour's negligent air of fashion, yet when she had perceived his eyes fixed upon her during the greater part of the opera of the preceding night, without any appearance of recognition, an involuntary sentiment of disappointment mingled itself with her surprise. She had seen Lady Danvers successively surrounded by all the leading men of the day; her most ordi-

nary comments had been hailed with applause ;—her looks, her gestures watched with the utmost devotion of admiration ;—and Helen, in whose ears the entrancing tones of Pasta possessed all the charm of novelty, secretly wondered that *her* incantations could be neglected for conversation of so trivial and uninteresting a character. Unprepared by a key to the cypher, uninitiated into the mysteries of the jargon of fashion, its dialogues seemed spoken in an unknown tongue ; its point was any thing but *piquant* in her ears ; its allusions were unfelt, its announcements uncared for. Little did she conjecture in how short a time that flippant jargon would assume the sole interpretation of her thoughts ;—little, very little imagine that in twelve short months her whole existence would be comprehended in the narrow circle, of which the oracles were now, for the first time, unfolded to her mind.

She tried to develope within her own feelings the nature of Lady Danvers's influence and fas-

cination. Was it her beauty?—No: the charm of youth had already faded from her cheek; and although the exquisite contrast between her dazzling fairness, and jet-black hair almost supplied its place, although a smile dimpled at times round her mouth with a sweetness almost supernatural, Lady Danvers could not be called a perfect beauty. Was it then her dress?—No: the simplest white robe, with her ebon hair braided, and waving round her face in inartificial disorder, formed her utmost adornment. But then the robe was formed of the most delicate and spotless materials,—and all the less important adjuncts of her toilet were daily refreshed. Every thing about her was carefully selected, and adjusted with the most scrupulous exactness; but it was elaborate only in its unsoiled nicety;—the fantastic frippery of fashion never shed its meretricious attractions round her person.—Was it then, after all, her wit which made the name of Lady Danvers the watchword of every brilliant coterie in London?

—Oh! no, no! Not a single *bon-mot*—not the recorded bitterness of one solitary *calembourg* could be traced to her lips. The pedants of the *beau monde* denounced her as a dunce—the blues as a trifler—the wits as a mere echo of the commonest common-places.

Yet with all this notorious deficiency of wit and wisdom, beauty and fashion, *Messieurs les beaux esprits, et Messieurs les élégants*, were equally, and in their own despite, the abject slaves of Honoria Danvers; and the charm which bound them to her footstool, was manifold and comprehensive as that of the Grecian sculptor's Venus. Springing in the first instance from a cheerful, ardent temperament, she possessed the desire and the power of amusing and being amused in a superlative degree. The verb *bore*, either in its passive or active sense, was to her lips an unknown syllable; the consciousness of *ennui*, an unimaginable sensation to her mind. Restricted chiefly to the society of the young and the gay, she was a

willing listener ; and when in turn she assumed her lead in conversation, the themes of her discourse were those best suited to her auditors, and discussed with a simplicity of argument and diction, which rendered her *entretien* the easiest in the world. Few men care to be fatigued by an over exaltation of sentiment or philosophy in the weaker sex. Their hours of relaxation from the severe duties of life, demand the enlivenment of a light tone of thought and feeling ; flying from the court or the senate to the *boudoir*, they rather seek to unbend their brows from the majesty of wisdom, than to wrangle in mimic argument with antagonists whose puny warfare is either ridiculous or offensive. And thus the society of Lady Danvers was habitually sought by the witty and the wise, as a medium of cheerfulness and repose, after the more intense excitement of their faculties.

Perhaps it would be easy to express the characteristics of her mind and manners, by the

cabalistic definition of *tact*—a quality whose possession implies the most delightful companion, and the worst friend in the world. This paltry domestic substitute for philosophy, is but a sort of gaseous emanation, betraying the existence of the more profound mental powers which lurk beneath. But it is an emanation mistrusted by the good and discriminating; for it is born of an union of acuteness of mind, with *shallowness of heart*.

And thus Lady Danvers in her *manière d'être*, was wholly secure from the interference of her feelings. She knew not what it was to be depressed, or elated, or even harassed by the casualties of life. Her reasoning powers were always at leisure to calculate—no tears obscured her mental vision. She had a husband whom it was her duty to love, but she did not love him—whom many would have hated, yet she did not hate him; nay, the even temperature of her politeness and consideration towards him, secured her an unlimited

influence in her conjugal life. She had children too—fair and promising children; but their ailments and little griefs had never cast a shadow over her enjoyments; her ample fortune insured their comfort and careful tending; but they had never yet tasked her sympathy with a mother's anxieties. She regarded her brother with the interest due to his rank in the world, and political influence; and was accordingly mortified that he should have formed an alliance wholly inefficient to the advancement of either. She was personally predisposed against Lady Willersdale as a bar to the interests of her own family; and as a probable restraint upon her own freedom of action. Perhaps as a beautiful rival; perhaps as a canting puritan; perhaps as a tactician cunning as herself, she might thwart, and circumvent, and expose her domestic manœuvres; perhaps ruffle, for the first time, the even current of her prosperity. A single glance upon Helen's guileless countenance, however, re-as-

sured her apprehensions ; she abandoned her original plan of defensive warfare ; and, if her cunning genius already suggested the adoption of wider scheming, her immediate intentions were those of sisterly courtesy, and affectionate family union. The transition cost her no exertion, for she had no *feelings* of rancour to subdue. Her movements were actuated by the cold craftiness of an experienced chess-player.

It is not to be supposed that a manœuvrer of so much skill and experience, would neglect the leading axiom of her profession, that “the first object of art is to conceal art.” Lady Danvers applied herself accordingly to the acquirement of a character of simplicity and cordiality in Helen’s eyes. She presented her with the warmest frankness to all her admirers, all her friends ; yet contrived, by skilfully engrossing their attention from the stranger, to leave her as much a stranger as before. She affected to regard her amusement as the sole object of the

evening ; yet, by turning the general conversation upon subjects exclusively connected with the passing gossip of the hour, she managed to make her doubly conscious of her loneliness amid the mighty crowd of London. With one smile of ridicule she silenced her musical enthusiasm ; with a still deeper expression of scorn, she checked her confessions of regret at the absence of Lord Willersdale, who was detained by his ministerial duties.

And when, on their return home, she had satisfied herself touching the due working of her spell, and had ascertained how deeply the lovely bride was dispirited by the perception of her personal insignificance, and cheerless isolation, she dextrously re-assured her timid self-distrust, by a thousand flatteries ; a thousand assurances of the attentions of which she was about to become an object ; and, at length having succeeded in persuading Lady Willersdale that she had been passing a delightful evening, and that every fresh introduction to society would be

fraught with new enjoyments, and increasing triumph, she permitted her to escape.

The wisest person may become a tool in the hands of the crafty ; and who would not rather be the dupe than the deceiver ?

CHAPTER V.

Craignez de ces messieurs la malice profonde !
Le premier pas que l'on fait dans le monde
Est celui dont dépend le reste de nos jours.
Legère une fois, on vous la croit toujours,
L'impression demeure.—*L'Indiscret.*

FORTUNATELY for the furtherance of Lady Danvers's plans, a press of important public business amassed during his temporary secession from his official duties, served at this time to engross the whole attention of her brother ; and Lady Willersdale, naturally anxious to secure his protection and countenance on her first entrance into the world, determined to postpone her general acceptance of the engagements of society, till her husband should be at liberty to become her companion. This prohibition, how-

ever, did not extend itself to public amusements, or to the private parties of Lady Danvers. Unwilling to remain a solitary denizen of her unaccustomed home, Helen willingly consented to accompany her sister-in-law to the opera, to the French play, to her private box at Covent Garden; as well as to join the frequent coteries which enlivened the saloon of Danvers House.

The first object of the wily Honoria—for personal interest or entertainment in such diversions had long been lost to her satiated feelings—her first object in dragging her inexperienced relative into scenes of public amusement, was to impress upon her mind the absolute necessity of having the attendance of some male acquaintance constantly at command. It became evident that a woman whose husband, her natural protector, was engrossed in professional or ministerial duties, and who could boast neither brother nor obsequious cousin among the idlers about town, to call her carriage, and become her escort through the offensive mob

haunting the purlieus of the London theatres, must secure the attendance of some other intimate friend for such emergencies. To depend upon accidental encounters, would be a wanton self-exposure to insult; upon Lady Danvers's representations, it became clear to the perceptions of Helen, that Honoria was herself compelled to accept the nightly courtesies of Clarence Wilmington, or some other male intimate; and that *she* must select for her own service some member of her immediate society, equally obliging and equally agreeable.

It was by no means, however, the intention of Lady Danvers to leave this important selection to the disposal of her brother's rustic bride. She felt that her own taste and tact would be compromised by any error of choice which might introduce some obscure, or at least unfashionable member, into her immediate coterie. She felt that a stranger, a man not sufficiently *répandu* in her little peremptory world, would bring shame upon her opera box;

and perhaps drive away that chosen circle of the *élite*, who formed her household gods, and the true object of her existence. For some time her choice remained balanced between the numerous pretendants seeking the distinction of devoting their public homage to a woman so beautiful, so fascinating, and so marked by her position in the world, as the youthful Lady Willersdale.

Among these, Henry Melbourne, the *attaché*, was the first whose eligibility appeared important in the eyes of the accomplished tactician. Well-born, and well-bred, accomplished, according to the sense of the jargon of society, and highly gifted in personal appearance, Melbourne had been the darling of more than one foreign court. But his *fatuité* overpowered the growth of his good qualities; and various instances of domestic treachery had affixed some passing clouds upon his character. The French decided that he was not a man “*d'un commerce*

sur ;” the English reviled him as a diplomatic coxcomb ; and Lady Danvers, in despite of his fashion and his figure, was too prudent to confide in one of such dubious discretion.

Lord Barton had also glanced among the varying shadows of her phantasmagoria ; but then she knew him as a man of strictest honour, of most unswerving rigour of moral principle ; one who, if he affixed his personal devotion to Helen’s side, would accept the office with a view to guard her from all evil, even of his own imagining ; and although Lady Danvers would have been well contented to secure so safe an escort for her fair sister-in-law, she felt that Barton’s frank and decided character might render him obnoxious to herself, as the constant companion of her pleasures. She was aware that the art of the most skilful fencer is rendered nugatory by the straight-favoured blows of an ignorant antagonist. Besides, she had a shrewd suspicion that Lord Barton’s discrimination had

penetrated into some of those mysteries of her character which she was so careful to shroud from the investigation of the world.

The third object of her speculations was one whom the rumours of society had distinguished as being peculiarly interesting to her own feelings. Clarence Wilmington was the younger brother of a good family, the poorest member of a rich one. Without information, he was brilliant in the tone of his conversation; without temper, he was at all times gay, and full of the *enjouement* of a cheerful mind. He was not personally handsome; yet his noble *tournure*, and the open expression of his countenance, made themselves remembered; none but refined expressions fell from his lips; none but gentlemanly actions could be traced throughout the details of his life. These qualifications, however sterling, however valuable, do not suffice to account for Wilmington's influence in society. *Répandu*, not alone among the popular circles of fashion, but in the supreme and

confidential coteries of the exclusive an idol or a friend,—the idol of all the women, the friend of all the men,—he was alternately named by his own sex as “the best fellow in the world;” and distinguished by the still more flattering silence of his female partizans. The charm by which he had contrived to unite such various, and seemingly incompatible suffrages, was that of perfect truth; he was in earnest in all he said, and all he did; faithful in his likings and dislikings; devoted with his whole heart to the object of his preference, and not to be tempted by absence, or time, or expediency, into one treacherous word or faithless action. He was, in short, *d’une bonne foi sans tache*; and Lady Danvers knew how to respect a character forming the very antipodes of her own. But she rejected him on the present occasion, as likely to prove *too much* in earnest. It was a lay figure she required, gifted with obedient immobility, and covered with a fashionable drapery:—a human creature, endued with the passions and generous

impulses of his kind, would probably exhibit a degree of wilful energy altogether superfluous.

A fortunate coincidence at length assisted the projects of the cunning Honoria. One night, as she stood by the stove of the Opera hall, waiting the return of Wilmington with the shawls, and contriving, by a dexterous engrossment of Lord Barton's and Mr. Melbourne's conversation, to throw Lady Willersdale completely into the back-ground, she was startled by the sudden approach of Colonel Seymour towards the listless Helen, and by the rapid and intense flush with which she returned his salutation. Relieved from the mortification of general neglect, she replied with gracious promptitude to his inquiries after her family; and Lady Danvers who, like all artful persons, suspected art and a latent motive in all she saw and all she heard, satisfied her mind with the instant conclusion that a passion, or at least a preference, had formerly existed between them. She had

long been acquainted with the handsome guardsman, as a popular and distinguished member of the society in which she moved ; she recognised in him the elements of a congenial spirit, of a worthy accomplice ; and hastening to engage him for a dinner-party at her own house on the following day, at which Lady Willersdale had already promised to assist, she determined on that occasion to extend her observations touching the relative position of the parties ; and, perhaps, to form some new project for their future direction.

Danvers House had long preserved its dinner reputation in the highest odour of sanctity. The crutches and flannels of its noble owner bore ample testimony to the personal devotion with which its hecatombs had been offered up for the last fifty years. During six months of the year, he found himself condemned by the equal Fates to do penance in a white sheet for the excesses of the remaining six ; and to substitute Husson and Colchicum, for Epernay and

Mursault. To become distinguished indeed in the domestic annals of gastronomy, a French cook, an Italian confectioner, and a German *maître d'hotel*, however indispensable, are not conclusive. The artists of the lower regions will not exert their talents with the enthusiastic fervour necessary for the production of a *chef-d'œuvre*, unless conscious of acting under the eye, or rather under the mouth of a discriminating patron. It is to the fosterhood of the Borghesi and the Farnesi, that we owe the master-pieces of Raphael;—it is to the palate of a Sefton or a Warrender, that we may attribute the triumphant *salmis* and *purées* of the present day.

Now the abstract notion formed by Lady Willersdale of a dinner entertainment was composed of a thousand unpleasing impressions. The laborious fussiness of a white-soup English housekeeper, wishing “to speak for a few minutes to my lady,” a temporary instalment in a cold provincial state drawing-room, of

which the blue-satin sofas, and elaborate steel stove were only permitted to visit the glimpses of the sun, on occasion of the seven o'clock arrival of certain worshipful coaches and four, bearing down a savage horde of squires and squiresses upon the innocent victims at Mordaunt Park; a long, hot, noisy entertainment, as stately as the old-fashioned silver *epergne*, and as dull as a November morning, formed her mental picture of a country dinner. Nor did the *ménage* of the Lilfields tend to improve its London *pendant*. Sir Robert was himself as heavy as his own service of plate. True to squirearchical prepossessions, he kept a matter-of fact English cook, much addicted to the crudities of the national *cuisine*, and an English butler, considerably addicted to his master's wine. He was fond of seeing his table profusely served, both in the animate and inanimate department. His parties were enormous; and "the House," even in its prosiest debate, was outprosod over Sir Robert Lilfield's venison.

Every extinct parliamentary question was revived—every bagged fox of the county of Durham turned out ;—Nash's architectural delinquencies were specifically recounted—Brummell's departed witticisms carefully resuscitated ;—the comparative criminality of John Bull and the Age, was discussed by those who affected never to read the pages of either ;—Napoleon was pronounced a monster, Canning a Charlatan, Lord Byron a demoniacal avatar, and Holland House the Hall of Eblis ! Then followed the dreary, doleful, dowager evening ;—the “ few friends ” startling the ear of night by knocks most awfully far between ; the never-ending, still-beginning procession of powdered domestics and green tea ; the long whist and longer stories ; of which, ever and anon, slanders upon the state of the weather filled up the pauses.

Wherever two or three English are gathered together, the weather becomes the first martyr on which they fasten their vampire fangs ; it

would appear to be a sort of chartered whipping-post, on which beginners may exercise their vituperative powers.

But Helen had now a far different spectacle before her eyes. The whole affair of the table was conducted by almost invisible machinery; the most exquisite viands dispersed with noiseless assiduity. The only exertions required from the select and well-assorted guests, even for the ladies committed to their courtesy, was an easy flow of conversation that required no effort. Yet every thing was said she wished to hear; every passing topic was illustrated by some original remark, that tasked the echoes of London society for a fortnight to come. The latest foreign intelligence—the newest new *bon mot* from White's—some fashionable marriage fresh sparkling from a proposal of the night before—some illustrious death, still guiltless of Bombazine—some infant heir whose first cry yet hovered on its lips—were severally discussed, and thrown aside with all their gloss of

novelty untarnished. The animation of the hour borrowed no temporary impulse from Champagne; and Lord Danvers himself was the only person at table whose lips were moistened by the sensual extacies of a gratified palate. For him the *fumet de gibier* did not extend its incense in vain; but for the witty, the beautiful, the distinguished, and the gay, who formed the chosen society of his dining-room, its enjoyments mingled in a consciousness of varied satisfactions, one and indivisible. They found themselves unmindful of the passing hour;—the sameness of existence seemed to acquire a momentary buoyancy;—and this is the true criterion of what is indiscriminately called *pleasure*!

It is said—and even forms one of the approved axioms of our moral cant—that the companions of our adversity become doubly endeared to our hearts! But who can rationally apply to the atmosphere of man's creation, to the poisoned and factitious character of civic

existence, the same maxims and motives which have originated amid the pure simplicity of the works of God? In London, it is not those who have witnessed our afflictions, but those who are the companions of our pleasures, who occupy our attention and engross our interest. The domestic peace of people of the world is at once destroyed by the pressure of pecuniary difficulties; pecuniary distress generally embitters the temper; and we are apt to avoid the society of those in whose presence we have been humiliated. In London, therefore, the companions of our adversity are shunned as mementos of misfortune!

The sharers of our diversions, on the contrary, acquire a still increasing charm. Associated in our minds with nothing but pleasing remembrances—with beautiful music and illuminated halls—with the brilliant crowd and its entrancing flatteries, we learn to regard them as a component part of our myriad-fold enjoyment. Their looks become incorporated in our thoughts

with the gleam of splendid scenes; their comments connect themselves in our ears with some soul-searching air of Mozart or Rossini. They are always ready to assist our reminiscences,—a hint is sufficient with them to save a world of explanation; *avec eux il n'est point necessaire de mettre les pointes sur les i.*

It was probably her consciousness of this weakness of human nature, which induced Lady Danvers to multiply occasions of meeting for Helen and Colonel Seymour. She managed to entangle him in all their projects of daily amusement. Whatever galleries they visited, or public monuments, or public gardens, his horse was sure to be in waiting on their arrival. Whatever concession towards superior rank etiquette might seem to require, Colonel Seymour was the person appointed to lead Lady Willersdale in to dinner; whatever officious zeal might be displayed by Lord Barton or Wilmington, Colonel Seymour's was the arm on which she found herself compelled to

lean, on seeking the carriage after the opera, or the ball. And for once he appeared ambitious to *deserve* the honours thus thrust upon him by the caprice of another; for once, laying aside his *pococurante* air of self-esteem, he exerted himself to appear entertaining and courteous. Colonel Seymour was an excellent mimic, and consequently an admirable *raconteur*; he had seen much of the world, and had seen it through the medium of an acute and caustic mind; and above all, he was gifted with that air of tranquil self-possession and presence of mind, which acquires so remarkable an influence for a speaker over his audience. He affected to talk for any purpose rather than that of yielding amusement to the persons he addressed; his thoughts seemed to escape him; his bitter satires to be the irrepressible workings of his soul; and his opinions were proportionably sought, and his witticisms proportionably valued.—They were known to be at no one's command; no! not even at his own!

But however calm and careless on other occasions, Colonel Seymour showed himself by Helen's side only as the most *empressé* of mankind; to mark his attention towards *her* he spared neither pains nor self-denial. In spite of his indolence he exerted himself to fulfil the most abhorrent duties;—to “fetch and carry, sing song up and down,” between herself and Lady Danvers; to call carriages,—to animate the stagnation of an ill-managed water-party,—to ransack nursery-grounds for impossible exotics,—and books for improbable quotations;—to divert to himself the persecutions of a persevering bore,—to talk of the *Marmite perpétuelle*, and the *Frères Provencaux*, and their *Huitres à l'estragon* to Lord Danvers; and of the Catholic Question and the state of the colonies to his ministerial brother-in-law. Both rewarded him with frequent and friendly invitations; he was as constantly the guest of their dinner-tables, as even Honoria herself could have desired.

At length the period arrived for Lady Willersdale's public entry into the lists of society. She was about to encounter her first Almacks,—a crisis which generally fixes the unsuspecting novice for life, in her appointed degree of future distinction; and which, in *her* instance, was favoured by every advantage which the *convenances* of London fashion can bestow. She appeared in the trying brilliancy of that crowded ball-room, leaning on the arm of its most popular patroness, and supported by the open adoration of her husband, one of the most influential ministers of the British cabinet. Young, and lovely, and beloved, the foldings of her white satin robe were draperied over a bosom where not one evil feeling had yet attempted to abide, and her diamond coronet sparkled round a brow which had never beat with repentance, or formed a single ungenerous conclusion. Her eyes were bright with intelligence and happiness; her whole air was buoyant with the animation of youth and health; her manner

was sweetly and peculiarly original ; and amid the vapid and faded crowd whose beauty had already satiated the public stare, Lady Willersdale's loveliness became at once sanctified into fashionable pre-eminence by the simultaneous decree of the room ! Her Lord rejoiced with trembling over the redundant measure of personal triumph which seemed to justify his choice ; and even Lady Danvers, who regarded her with the selfish pride of patronage and close kindred, secretly exulted in the unqualified success of one whose brilliancy became incidentally reflected upon herself.

Scarcely had the beautiful bride endured an hour of illustrious presentations, blushing through the congratulatory addresses of the Dowagers, and blushing still deeper under the intense gaze of their grandsons, when she found herself embarrassed by the patroness-dignities imposed upon Honoria. To escape from the awful high place of the synagogue, she sauntered back, leaning on Lord Willersdale, to-

wards the lower end of the room. An inspiring waltz burst suddenly from the orchestra, and in a moment she found herself engaged by Lord Barton to join the dancers;—in another she was whirling round the room, and attracting the admiration of the whole circle by the easy elegance of her movements. Lord Willersdale's brow became suffused with the deepest crimson as their involuntary comments reached his ears.

It had never occurred to his mind that a wife so young and so unversed in the pleasures of the world, was likely to be fond of dancing; and even had it done so, he would have scorned to thwart her inclinations by prohibition. The Mordaunts were in general a solemn race, and Lady Lilfield herself a very petrification of formality; where then could Helen have acquired, and how concealed her elasticity of heart and soul? He gazed upon her as she floated along, sustained by the arm of a comparative stranger, till a thousand bitter feelings began to struggle in his bosom. But by what

right could he condemn her? He had expressed no disapprobation of her intention;—it had presented itself as a matter of course; and he would have considered it an act equally tyrannical and impolitic, to deter her from an innocent exercise, by the tenacious jealousy of his views on the subject. He was aware that there are dangers which derive their peril only from the warnings of the officious.

Again she danced,—again, and again: and still with increased triumph, and apparently with increasing pleasure. Towards two o'clock Lord Willersdale, wearied by his official exertions of the morning, approached to remind her that the carriage was in waiting. “Cannot you leave me with Lady Danvers?” she replied; “I am engaged for a *galopade* with Mr. Wilmington, and should be particularly sorry to detain you. Honoria chaperones Miss Percy, and will therefore stay late; and she has already offered to take me home.”

The disconcerted Willersdale could find

nothing to object to this arrangement ; he would have given worlds that Helen had afforded him some excuse for offering to remain ; but having committed himself by an express anxiety to return home, he was obliged to wish her good night with as good a grace as he could command : leaving her to the assiduities of companions of her own age, and exposed to the approaches of twenty fashionable libertines. As he departed, with an expression of any thing rather than satisfaction visible on his countenance, Wilmington and Melbourne, who had been listening unobserved to this interesting conjugal colloquy, suddenly looked in each other's faces, and rushed into the tea-room to conceal their immoderate laughter.

“ I have long been persuaded,” said Melbourne, between the pauses of the peal, “ that nothing equals the impudence of *naïveté* : I never saw a man look more thoroughly *planté* than poor Willersdale.”

“ By heavens !” exclaimed the handsome

Clarence, attempting to suppress his risibility, “she has a degree of spirit for which I did not give her credit. She will do—Harry—she will do! There is nothing like coolness in managing a husband; and *une des notres* would not, I think, have displayed a more resolute intention of having her own way. The *sang froid* with which our rustic, unsophisticated *belle* sent Willersdale home to bed, in order that she might waltz unmolested for the remainder of the night, was positively *impayable*.”

“I dare say he is beginning to find out that

Crabbed age and youth
Cannot live together.”

added Melbourne, with a sneer.

“No, no!—not *crabbed* age; no one can justly apply that epithet to Willersdale, who is the most indulgent creature breathing. I assure you ‘his countenance was more in sorrow than in anger,’ as he sighed his way towards his solitary carriage.”

“Probably more in penitence than either.

I doubt not he is fretting himself into a jaundice of jealousy by this time."

And in this conjecture, the young men were not greatly mistaken. Lord Willersdale no longer disguised from himself that he was inwardly vexed by what had occurred. "And my reserve—my vacillation—my confounded silence, have confirmed the evil," thought he, as he hastily traversed his splendid library. "My Helen!—my dear pure, simple Helen, has been seen waltzing with half the coxcombs in London, by their whole assembled corps, while *I* stood by to sanction the performance. It is now understood, therefore, and settled, that she dances; to forbid her now, would be to avow my narrow jealousy, and to assume the severity of a tyrant in her eyes, and thus insure the insolent ridicule of every idiot in town! It is a *contre-temps*,—but now inevitable. She must run the gauntlet of vice and folly, like all the rest of her sex; and *I*, alas! must guard her safety by my unobtrusive watchful-

ness, and sanctify it by my blessings. I will speak to Honoria to-morrow, to unite with me, in so precious a charge; thank heaven that I am able to command an assistant so able, and so fervently in my interests."

CHAPTER VI.

Turn o'er the leaf, and let this tale alone,
If any think the sex by this disgraced ;
I write it for no spite, nor malice none,
But in life's breathing-book I find it traced.

Harrington's Ariosto.

It was towards the close of the first exciting fortnight of Helen's career of dissipation, that Sir Stephen and Lady Mordaunt, who were in the act of performing progress from daughter to daughter, proposed passing a few days at a neighbouring hotel, in order that they might personally assure themselves of the safety and well-being of their "dearest Lady Willersdale." "I have been fulfilling my annual duty of presiding over Sophia's confinement," wrote this

tenderest of mothers ; “and we have promised to be with the Lilfields during their races ; which arrangement leaves us an idle week for London—our ‘shortest road from Fern Wood. Therefore, my dear child, I propose that we should dine with you on Tuesday next.”

Lady Willersdale’s first movement on perusing this gratifying epistle, was to reproach herself with an unnatural want of ardour at the prospect of seeing her parents ; to *reproach* herself with the mental discernment which had detected their views in the disposal of her hand. From her early youth she had become aware that her father considered his five daughters as a superfluous clog upon the interests of his three sons ;—that he honoured his son-in-law, Sir Herbert Gray, chiefly as being connected with that stepping-stone of the beneficed church—the Lord High Chancellor ; and esteemed his son-in-law, Sir Robert Lilfield, in an exact ratio with the number of votes he could command in the county represented by his own

hopeful heir. She could not forget the arguments by which her mother and Sir Stephen had enforced her own acceptance of a man, who deserved a nobler distinction than to be doubtfully endured for the sake of his church patronage and ministerial interest. Her pride was wounded, both for her husband's sake and her own; nay, she had more than once attributed the calmness of his demeanour towards her—a calmness which we have already traced to its true origin—to his suspicions of the fact that she had married him with a very moderate degree of personal affection, and under a parental influence instigated by very unworthy motives.

Since her marriage, indeed, a conscientious sense of right had urged her to seize every occasion of pleasing Lord Willersdale; and of seeking to discover in his character such qualities as might finally win and engross her entire affections. But she had sought in vain! Her esteem, her admiration, her reverence, he had long commanded. Both in public and do-

mestic life, he was a man on whom the shadow of dishonour had never rested ; but the virtues which dignified his pre-eminence, were such as do, in truth, *command esteem*; and such are precisely the most inefficient in the power of *winning the affections* of a youthful female heart. Had she seen him in all the cheerful indulgence of his natural character,

In the happier hour
Of social gladness ill-exchanged for power,

and unconstrained by the consciousness of having a part to play, she would indeed have loved him. She would have loved him for the trusting fervency of his affection towards herself; she would have loved even his anxiety to preserve her spotless from the contamination of the worldly and the worthless. But she had lately learned to regard him as severe and cold and fastidious ; as shunning the lighter pleasures of society from a sense of his own superiority ; and as marking his indifference towards herself

by the zeal with which, in daily renouncement of her company, he threw himself anew into the duties of official life. She sometimes imagined that he had married her from some sudden fancy, to complete his magnificent establishment by the appanage of a wife. Lady Danvers, indeed, had insinuated to her, that he was particularly anxious to prolong the dignities of his ancestral line by an heir ; and all these humiliating convictions tended at once to enhance in her mind the consolations and joys of that society in which she was worshipped ; and to re-double the reserve which withheld her from seeking the confidence of her husband.

The visit of Sir Stephen and Lady Mordaunt occurred under the inauspicious influence of these reflexions. Lady Willersdale prepared herself to meet them with an inward dread that they might penetrate the disturbance of her secret feelings ; that they would at least interrupt the course of amusement by which she strove to divert her attention from her own

position; and with a still further suspicion that their observations, and views, and principles, would degrade her in her husband's eyes, and possibly cause some further estrangement between them.

In one respect Lady Mordaunt's deportment fully justified her alarms. Her raptures at the aspect of her daughter's brilliant establishment were unbounded; but she began to lament with vociferous eagerness the irregularity and extravagance which Helen's inexperience must necessarily introduce into its details; and to expose her own theory of domestic economy with a parsimonious minuteness that would have done honour to the white-soup housekeeper. Fortunately the gentlemen were engrossed by the discussion of a theoretical pamphlet upon *political* economy, by a new author:—one of those miraculous aloes whose blossoming men run to stare at for a day, and whose insipid leaves regain the next their original obscurity.

Lady Mordaunt's next step was to visit the

luxurious retirement of Lady Willersdale's own apartments; to marvel at its splendours; and to expatiate on the happiness of the possessor of so many mother-of-pearl combs and agate brushes. But even the sterling glory of the casket of diamonds did not subdue her restless curiosity touching the dormitorial capabilities of the mansion. Till she had ascertained that there was a spare bed open to her speculations for "dear Jane," the daughter of the Mordaunt succession house whose presentation was fixed for the following spring, she did not concede her perfect and unqualified approbation to the arrangements in Hamilton-Place.

"What a lovely harp—sandal-wood and steel!—French of course?—I hope, my dear Helen, it is not an extravagance of yours?—Your own old favourite double action, which your father so generously gave up to you on your marriage, was a most superior instrument!"

"The tone of this little *bijou* is excellent. It was a *galanterie* from Lady Danvers."

“Oh ! if it is her ladyship’s selection, it *must* be perfect. And, by the way, Helen, you can have no occasion for the old harp now, with this treasure in your hands. Poor Jane is always missing it.”

“My dear mamma, it shall be sent down to my sister without delay.”

“Lady Danvers appears very kind to you, my dear ; I hope you omit no occasion of cultivating her friendship. Those kind of people are easily conciliated by a little delicate subserviance to their whims. My daughter Lilfield was observing to me only the other day, of how much use Lady Danvers might be to the girls. Poor Jane will be looking to you to help her about Almacks.”

“I recollect that my sister formerly entertained a very indifferent opinion of her character.”

“Hush ! my dear Helen—hush ! How do you know that your maid is not in the next room ? One cannot be too cautious in speaking

of character :—personality is as dangerous as it is vulgar. My daughter Lilfield very sensibly observes that we should talk of *things* and not of *persons*.”

“ Believe me, she has not always adhered to her own maxim in Lady Danvers’s case.”

“ My dear, your sister is a very well-judging woman. Her family increases ; she has already several daughters, most of them promising to be ugly. Now, I only ask you whether she would be wise, under such circumstances, to neglect a woman holding Lady Danvers’s place in society ? ”

“ With due deference to the ugliness of my little nieces, I should say—certainly. With *her* opinion of Honoria’s character, my sister, as the guardian of her daughters, has a double motive for shunning such an acquaintance.”

“ Your argument only proves, my dear Helen, how little you know of the world ; I had hoped, indeed, that your intercourse with the circle in which you are so fortunate as to move,

would give you a clearer insight into things. Nothing can exceed the impertinence of presuming to give laws to society ; any person whom you find favoured by its good opinion, you have no right to suppose unworthy the distinction. It argues a very uncharitable persuasion of one's own merit, to be the first to throw the stone, and fix the stigma of reprobation upon another—as my daughter Lilfield very sensibly observes.”

“ Pray do not suppose, mamma, that I affect such a severity of matronly virtue. I am only curious to know by what process Honoria's character has become bleached at Beech-Park. I once heard it *hinted* down to the lowest degree of degradation; and I should be glad to hear how Anna Maria had managed to hint it up again.”

“ My dear Lady Willersdale,” said her mother, with earnest solemnity, “ let me beg of you to make this the great rule of your conduct in your association with the world—that every woman who lives under her husband's

protection, has a right to be considered a woman of character. It was the regulation established by the late Queen Charlotte—the purity of whose court was proverbial. Your husband's mother was a lady-in-waiting ; ask *him*, and he will tell you that no interest or influence could ever persuade her majesty to receive a *divorcée*, or a natural daughter ; but no objection was ever made to the appearance at Court of a woman living with her husband, let her conduct be what it might.”

“ How important it must have been in those days to secure an alliance with a man of a mean spirit, or unobservant mind. How necessary to add hypocrisy to one's other vices — ”

“ You must surely have read that hypocrisy is ‘ *un hommage que le vice rend à la vertu !* ’ ”

“ A very despicable tribute.”

“ Perhaps so, but not the less vital to the interests of society. Now there is your sister Lilfield ! I do not know a woman more strict in her own conduct, or more scrupulous re-

specting female character in general; but she has had a difficult part—a *very* difficult part to play among her neighbours at Beech Park. You remember that pretty place on the hill, about a mile from Durham,—a white house with an avenue, and fine conservatories, and every thing respectable about it?—Well, who do you think took it last year?—Why, that unhappy daughter of our Kentish neighbour, Mrs. Worsley, who ran away from her husband——”

“ With a cousin, to whom she had been engaged from her infancy, and during whose absence in the Peninsula, she was compelled to marry old Admiral Vyse. Yes; I remember it all: she was divorced.”

“ And is now married to her seducer. They live entirely in the country, and as I understand in the most quiet and respectable manner. She has a village school which, I am told, equals the one at Beech Park; but I never say so before Anna Maria, for you know it is her weak point. Well, my dear, when these people set-

tled themselves in Durham, poor Mrs. Worsley over-persuaded me to write to Lady Lilfield, and remind her, that her daughter had once been her playfellow ; and that her humility and penitence almost equalled her former offences ; in short, that any notice conferred upon her from Beech Park would be a serious obligation to the whole family, and a Christian mercy to the unhappy creature.”

“ Poor Mrs. Worsley ! her pride must have been bitterly rebuked by writing such a letter.”

“ And your sister really showed so much character—so much nerve—for her’s was a very trying predicament. She wrote me in answer—and it was a very sensible, well-worded letter,—just such a one as I could shew the Worsleys—she wrote me that she had always held the example of her late Majesty a mirror of domestic virtue ; and that as Queen Charlotte had made it her rule to discourage vice by receiving no *divorcée* at her court, she felt herself under the necessity of declining Mrs. Meynell’s

visits at Beech Park ! Now that is what I call character—presence of mind.”

“ *Mind !* ” reiterated Lady Willersdale, throwing down the rose she had been unconsciously tearing to pieces ; “ and my sister, too, who attends all the public days at Delvile castle ! ”

“ But, my dear, the Duchess of Delvile, notorious as she is, lives under the protection of her husband.”

“ An honour shared by her grace, with half a dozen *ci-devant* housemaids. Lord Willersdale assures me, mamma, that the conduct of that woman is a disgrace to her sex.”

“ Pray, my dear, speak lower. Why I own my daughter Lilfield saw such things going on between her and Sir Ralph Harborton last year, when she was staying at the castle, as absolutely horrified her. But then, you know, the duke is Lord-Lieutenant of the county ; besides Anna Maria is undeviating in her rules of conduct.”

The tap of Vernon, the accomplished groom

of the chambers, announcing dinner, fortunately interrupted Lady Willersdale's comment of reply.

The demeanour of her Lord towards Sir Stephen and Lady Mordaunt, was on this occasion as it had ever been, a model of good breeding and good nature. Between himself and the former, a topic of discourse presented itself, which was unaffectedly interesting to Lord Willersdale's feelings. Sir Herbert Gray, the son-in-law whose progeny had been recently increased under Lady Mordaunt's auspices, was his school-fellow, college-fellow, and tory-fellow. He was a dense dull man; whose upright intentions and sobriety of conduct always rendered him a creditable object of inquiry. His friends were never apprehensive of being shocked by allusions to his "ill-timed vivacity at a recent county dinner,"—by his tenacity about his preserves—his severity with his tenants—his committal of a juvenile offender for paring a turnip in a field—or an undue exertion of his

might and right as a commissioner of the roads. He was free from all the seven deadly sins of his calling as a magistrate and a country baronet ; being a well-meaning, inactive man, by no means addicted to inflict the martyrdom of Burn's Justice upon the vagrancy and old womanhood of his county. Aware how amply its peaceful parochial districts are legislated by those cherubim with flaming swords,—the magnanimous and magnalitous unpaid magistracy of the realm,—he restricted his public exertions to the cultivation of short-tailed sheep, and long-horned cattle.

Touching these agrarian propensities, his autumnal fall of timber, a lake which had been cleaned out during their visit, and a new laundry to be completed previous to their next, Sir Stephen was most graciously communicative to his courteous son-in-law ; and if Lord Willersdale's thoughts were guilty of a secret recurrence to the debate of the preceding night, his answers were as prompt and appro-

priate, as if he had eaten the entire two hundred and thirty-two brace of carp, purchased all the "capital oak timber," and mathematized the flues of the four copper boilers.

With Lady Mordaunt's pompous recapitulation of the sensible remarks, and admirable diction mestic code of her "daughter Lilfield," he had somewhat less patience. The very name of Beech Park was nauseous in his ears, from the grandiloquent verbosity of its master, and the *air prétentionné*, and narrow-minded, self-opinionated nothingness of his Anna Maria. He knew that the "sound sense" of the former, consisted in a few well-mouthed sentences, pilfered from the early numbers of the Quarterly Review, which have been shelved long enough to be safe of quotation; and that the "good sense" of the latter was patchworked into a Macedoine of stiff prose, culled in deliberate gleanings from Chapone, Trimmer, Barbauld, Graham, Bowdler, and all the other infinite essayists who direct their lucubrations

towards the enlightenment of the gentler sex ;— of doctrines good in themselves, but distorted by evil interpretation. It was in vain that Lady Mordaunt found an *à propos* in every thing eaten, drunk, or discussed, to some synonym at Beech-Park ; her discreet son-in-law, allowed her ample space and verge enough to wear the subject threadbare. His forbearing silence enabled her to parade and prose herself out of breath ; and during her temporary inattention, the high-mightiness of her daughter Lilfield was also suffered to perish.

Helen meanwhile was suffering tortures of mortification. The dinner appeared to her for the first time an interminable process ; the *entrées* inexcusably retarded ; the dessert an unattainable relief ; she even uttered a word to the mild and assiduous Vernon, more nearly approaching to reproof, than any that had ever roughened her gentle lip. But as

Time and tide wear out the darkest day,
so even a family dinner must draw eventually

to its conclusion; and Lady Willersdale, as she followed the audible lustring of her mother up the illuminated staircase, began to thank that national custom, which empannels the males after *their* kind, and the females after *their* kind, during the sacred hours set apart for coffee and digestion. But an awful vision interrupted her self-gratulation on reaching the drawing room! There, seated in her own especial silken *bergère*, with her tiny feet resting on her own peculiar divan, arrayed in her whitest pearls, her purest white satin, and archest smile, there was the *malencontreuse* identity of Lady Danvers herself.

“ My dearest Honoria! I begged Vernon to let you know that a particular engagement would prevent my accompanying you to-night to Devonshire House.”

“ And Vernon, more courteous than yourself, obligingly informed me of the true particulars of this engagement. Although you had not the amiability to invite me to your family

party, you perceive that I amend the fault, by inviting myself; and since you appear to grudge me the honour of a presentation to Lady Mordaunt, you must excuse my taking upon me the office of your chamberlain. Lady Mordaunt, suffer me to introduce to your notice, your daughter's sister-in-law."

Lady Mordaunt, startled out of all her conventional composure, mingled her reiterated curtsies to the peremptory Viscountess, with a thousand apologies for Helen's remissness. "Marrying as she did out of the school-room, I trust your ladyship will pardon her want of knowledge of the world. Under *your* instruction, I have every hope of seeing her become all that Lord Willersdale can wish."

"I have no reason to imagine that my brother would consider any change an improvement."

"His Lordship is very indulgent," answered Lady Mordaunt, simpering.

"On the contrary, dear madam, it is because

his taste is peculiarly fastidious, that he knows how to appreciate the lady who is blushing so indignantly at our personality. Helen, my dear, in the catalogue of your errors, be that of blushing speedily reformed ! A blush betrays more secrets than an usher of the back stairs."

" Now that is so like an observation of my daughter Lilfield's ! Do you know, my dear madam, it was only the other day that she said to me, " I wonder what Helen will do with her blushes at Almack's ? "

" Oh ! we leave them in the cloak room,—don't we, Helen ? " said Lady Danvers, significantly.

" And by the way, my dear," resumed the voluminous Lady Mordaunt, gathering herself together into a corner of the sofa, " What was that nonsense in the Morning Post about your waltzing ? "

" *Nonsense* in the Morning Post !—Impossible ! " said Lady Danvers, with earnest gravity.

" Impossible !—I thought so.—Lady Lil-

field observed directly that the thing *was* impossible; that no daughter of mine would commit herself by such abominable levity. *She* indeed never approved my allowing Helen and poor Jane to waltz even with the governess;—but I used to tell her that all that sort of thing was as easily forgotten as it was learned; and would give them an air.”

“Certainly;—I do not know a better recipe for a *tournure*. But I cannot equally applaud Lady Lilfield’s condemnation. Lady Willersdale waltzes continually, and remarkably well too;—I waltz myself—we all waltz—*et pourquoi non*? At our age it is hard to be driven to the resource of scandal or flirtation for our ball-room amusement. For my own part I dance upon principle, in order to avoid the dangers of idleness.”

“Oh! if your Ladyship and Lord W. sanction the affair, it is quite a different thing. In *my* time, married women never went out without their husbands, and never danced: our

intercourse with the Continent has superseded such old-fashioned national customs. As my daughter Lilfield drily says, "Every age has its improvements."

"In your time, my dear madam, I am convinced that London was in a horrible state of demoralization. I never had a good opinion of Ranelagh; and as to the calm deliberate audacity of being stared at through a minuet, I am persuaded that the *pas grave* was the *premier pas* to a thousand indiscretions. And then your masquerades were an offence of the deepest dye; while *our* prudish vanity never goes beyond the *volto sciolto* of the simple fancy ball."

"Very true!" replied Lady Mordaunt, gaining time by a profound bow to assist her guesses at the possible meaning of "*volto sciolto*."

"Believe me, my dear madam," continued Lady Danvers, glancing towards Helen's embarrassed looks, "believe me that the hurry-scurry of the present day leaves very little leisure for mischief. *Tout va vite—la danse—la mu-*

sique — la mode. The rapidity of the waltz affords no pause for soft nothings; and the endless whirl of our engagements supersedes the possibility of plots such as endangered Miss Harriet Byron, and annihilated Miss Clarissa Harlowe. *Tout va vite—on n'a plus le temps de préméditer le mal;* and I understand that the Society for the Suppression of Vice has even petitioned Parliament in favour of this accelerated velocity."

Lady Mordaunt was puzzled to decide whether the illustrious patroness were in jest or earnest; so cutting short the mystification, she turned suddenly to her daughter —

"And pray, my dear, who was the Colonel Seymour whom the Morning Post mentioned as your partner?"

"Do you not remember him at Mordaunt? My brother John brought him down for the holidays."

Lady Mordaunt recollected him only as a younger brother who travelled per mail; and

immediately assumed an air of contemptuous reminiscence.

“Colonel Seymour is cousin to the Duke of Delville, heir to Lord Forrestone, as well as to old Lady Gertrude Wentworth,” carelessly but carefully observed Lady Danvers, as she amused herself with setting in motion the outstretched hands of an oratorical bonze. “He is in the House, and the Guards, and the Traveller’s Club—and the fashion. We can neither dine nor dance without him; yet we are often obliged to spare him down to Windsor; for Seymour is in fact *l’enfant chéri des dames de la cour et de la ville*. By the way, my dear Helen; do not expect me to get myself into *mauvaise odeur* at Devonshire House by taking your excuse. Your excellent sister, Lady Lilfield, would remind you of the impolicy of giving unnecessary offence in such a quarter.”

Lady Mordaunt accepted the supposed compliment to her absent favourite, with a smiling bow.

“Vernon informs me that Sir Stephen has ordered his carriage at eleven. My brother must go down to the House for the division;—and you, my dear, must complete your toilet between twelve and two; for till that hour, as it is one of the crush nights, I shall do myself the honour of waiting your pleasure in this *bergère*.”

Lady Willersdale, harassed and apprehensive of some absurd persuasive on the part of her mother, silently complied; and the agreeable termination of a most disagreeable day, which Honoria’s obliging management had secured her, became doubly delightful by the force of contrast.

Lady Mordaunt’s “daughter Lilfield” would probably have contemplated with horror, the animation with which her sister threw herself among the dancers, in order to escape a thousand painful reflexions.

CHAPTER VII.

Ce qui me persuade le plus de la Providence, disait le profond auteur de Bachabilleboquet, c'est que pour nous consoler de nos innombrables misères, la Nature nous a fait *frivoles* ;—nous oublions en voltigeant, toutes les horreurs que nous avons éprouvées.

Essai sur la frivolité.—VOLTAIRE.

THE London season was now in its zenith ; and the world, the *exclusive* world, whose territories are so narrow of limit, and whose population is so easily resolved by the census of Debrett, seemed intoxicated by delicious excitation. Streets resounding with rattling wheels, from the first universal roar of morning business, to the last solitary sulky chariot bearing home to a daylight pillow, some first-year's lingerer of the ball-room :—clubs, murmuring like beehives, and attracting in one busy swarm the swarthy

Nabob from his barbaric and selfish splendour—the pale official—the bilious *gourmand*—the supercilious man of letters—and the apathetic man of fashion:—exhibitions at once dazzling and disappointing the fastidious eye, while they suspend the breath of their visitants by an oppressive, ill-flavoured atmosphere:—shops wherein the mighty efforts of the whole kingdom, the whole continent, unite to supply or to suggest our wants:—public walks, and public drives, bright with an animated crowd of youth and beauty:—theatres doing their ill-requited best to beguile the idler from his weariness:—the opera extending its aristocratic refinements to the general enjoyment: these, with a ceaseless but varying succession of dinners, balls, concerts, *déjeuners*, and water-parties; of water-parties, *déjeuners*, concerts, balls, and dinners—proclaimed that “the season,”—the canicular Spring—was existent in all its fervid force! The Senates of Westminster and King Street, were in due convocation; the edicts of both be-

ing harassed by a factious opposition, and threatened by a *fronde* of no mean energy. Tattersall's and the Red House disputed for the mob of cabriolets: Triaud and Dévy for the mob of Britschkas. The elaborate taste of Storr was torn in pieces between the claims of Lord Breloque's gold *nécessaire*, and the Duchess of Delville's ninety-fifth bracelet. Groups of exotic singers were grunting at the Argyll Rooms and Egyptian Hall; a kangaroo took likenesses at one Bazaar, and literary cats displayed their skill in orthography at another. Epsom, with its yellow-satin-jacket postilions, had given place to the more select promise of Ascot; moss roses were hawked about at a discount by ragged mothers of "six small children;" Gunter was taxing his exhausted imagination for the *caramel* novelties of a *fête champêtre*; and half the pillows in Grosvenor Square were rendered sleepless by the anxious indecisions of an approaching *bal costumé*.

Delicious crisis!—during whose poignant bre-

vity hearts are apt to beat themselves into apathy for the remainder of the year, and a thousand rapid and disjointed impressions unite to form one visionary whole:—appeasing moment!—when enmity unconsciously loses itself in some selfish calculation:—re-vivifier of the jaded bosom!—which quickens acquaintance into friendship, and liking into love, between the pauses of a debate or a quadrille:—gay Carnival of quaint disguises! where each smiles upon the other from beneath an avowed mask of duplicity:—acmê of demoralization!—when oaths are sworn and vows broken,—fortunes lost and dishonour gained,—domestics and job-horses rendered up to the most uncompromising martyrdom,—country cousins and the prosy friends of our youth abandoned without remorse to the infamy of their vocation,—what are the pleasures of the brightest day of all the barren year beside, compared with the sanguine, buoyant, beaming, joyous frivolity of thy very dullest hour!

The most learned Professor, the gravest Philosopher, selects “the Season,” for the exposition of his miracles—Irving’s oracular predictions become co-temporary with Pasta’s lighter notes;—*in the season* new books are printed—*in the season* new theories are circulated. The long-absent are to be met with in its crowded streets; the long-parted become re-united in its illuminated saloons. The illustrious and the powerful are familiarly mingled in its mob;—its echoes vary with unimaginable novelties of colloquial invention; and wit is wittiest, and wisdom wisest during the revolution of its hour-glass,—for they know that the applause of thousands is waiting to reward their efforts.

And who of all that motley crowd, who, among the gay, the splendid, and the beautiful, could enter with a more genuine spirit of enjoyment into its sights and sounds, than the young and inexperienced Lady Willersdale! Wherever her brilliant equipage glanced onward through the streets, admiring eyes rested wonderstruck upon

her loveliness ; in whatever society the sweet and unstudied accents of her voice made themselves heard, silence waited respectfully upon her most trivial observation, and flattering commendations hung upon her least-valued opinions. Did she enter a ball-room, a murmur of delight thrilled through the assembly, and an instantaneous crowd pressed anxiously around her ; was she announced as the patroness of some institution, the subscription list was filled in an hour. Every species of homage which the world could offer was at her feet ; as the wife of a popular minister, as a woman of singular beauty and exquisite elegance, she was equally oppressed by the ready incense of an adoring multitude.

Lord Willersdale already felt his presentiments to be fully justified. Already he believed his Helen wedded to the world and its vanities ; and became persuaded that his own importance in her eyes, as well as the value of domestic affections in her estimation, was wholly eclipsed

by the glaring light of fashion and popularity wherewith she was surrounded. He had wished her to live for the world—but not solely;—he had placed the inebriating chalice of pleasure at her lips, and wondering to see her savour its delicious beverage, he dared no longer offer to her thirst that clear simple-rock spring, in whose pure waters no danger abides. In regard to his wife, he perceived the mischief of a thousand indulgences that had formerly appeared innocent and natural in his sister's practice; nay, he half repented the confidence with which he had intrusted Helen's guidance through the paths of fashionable temptation, to a being whom he considered so credulously artless as Lady Danvers.

Nor was this all.—A thousand important cares of public life happened at this period to press upon his mind, and demand his attention; and he felt that the duty he had sworn to his country, forbad him to sacrifice, for a single moment,

the interests of the nation to those of his domestic peace. The session was drawing to a close; its questions were of vital moment to the State. He found himself repeatedly compelled to assemble at his own house, parties whose gravity and pre-occupation in public business would have rendered Lady Willersdale's presence an ill-timed intrusion; and he was forced to entreat that his gentle bride would fulfil alone, unsupported, unprotected, a thousand engagements in society, to which his valuable time could no longer be devoted.

At first, this unrestrained intercourse with the world was inexpressibly irksome. To satisfy her husband, however, she overcame the terrors of her timidity; and the tears with which she had contemplated her first solitary entrance, soon became changed into smiles, by the adulation, the sympathy, the tenderness, which she found springing to welcome her on every side. Lord Willersdale was congratulated even amid his parliamentary solemnities, upon the unex-

amplified success of his lovely Helen;—he was told of her as the ascendant star of fashion—as the observed of all observers;—and he trembled while he listened! He almost regretted the precipitate punctuality which had carried Lady Mordaunt into Durham, to her “daughter Lilfield’s” races; and at length suggested an invitation for the remainder of the season to the hum-drum Grays. Even Lady Gray, however, was unattainable as a companion for the youthful bride; she acknowledged herself to be, as usual, engrossed by the domestic agonies of a teething child, and a change of housekeepers!

“And where is Willersdale to-night?” said Lord Barton to the animated Helen, as, radiant with beauty and enjoyment, she traversed the magnificent ball-room of — House; where she was acting as *chaperon* to one of the fairest *débutantes* of the season, her cousin, the Lady Anne Gardner.

“I scarcely ever see him now,” was her careless reply. “He is too considerate to oppress

me with even a suspicion of the cares of state ; and I, in my turn, am too grateful to molest him with the tumult of my giddy existence. His time, indeed, is entirely taken up in Downing-street ;—but we are to pass his holidays in Ireland, and then we shall meet, as if after a prolonged absence.”

“ I fear you have been long enough a minister’s wife to look upon the question I am about to make, with very diplomatic suspicions ; but mind—I do not require you to commit yourself by a reply. If you are unwilling to answer me, beg Lady Anne to grant me the favour of her hand for the next quadrille ; and I shall consider myself banished and commanded to silence.”

“ Your mysterious prologue almost alarms me. What is it you wish to know ?”

“ Whether Lady Willersdale has heard no rumours of a change of administration ?—whether you are not aware that all London is busy with the formation of a new ministry ?”

“ On my honour, no !”

“ But the public prints are filled with nothing else.”

“ I never read one line of them. A newspaper appears to me only a chartered chronicle of falsehoods ; of scandal gleaned from the servants’ hall—and politics manufactured by the porters of the public offices. But tell me, I beseech you, are there any grounds for such a rumour ?”

“ I am perhaps as little of a politician as yourself ; and derive my information solely from the gossip of the clubs. The opinions of to-day were strongly in favour of a change ; and Lord Willersdale was even named as having sent in his resignation.”

“ I rejoice to hear it,” exclaimed Helen, with earnest sincerity : “ the home of a public man becomes a mere desert ; his affections and interests are centred elsewhere ; and his wife is driven to seek in the world a refuge from her solitude. I can conceive no distinctions capable

of affording compensation to an official man for all that he resigns in the pursuit of fame."

"Certainly not to one who, like Lord Willersdale, is placed by birth, and fortune, and merit, already on the highest pinnacle. But pray, let me congratulate you on your philosophy; my tidings have not put a single curl out of order."

"Oh! if you knew how deeply the change favours my chances of happiness!"

"I believe you from my soul; and I rejoice to see you sensible to such a truth. Pardon me, dear Lady Willersdale," eagerly added Lord Barton, "for believing for a moment that the world might have already taught you some of its dangerous lessons; I stand corrected! It is my own intense admiration which leads me to fear that you may become too sensible to the admiration of others."

"Thank you for your favourable opinion of my stability; you have wrapped it up in the tinselled tissue of a compliment; yet still, I can

perceive you think me the veriest moth that ever scorched its wings in the glare of fashion. Nay, no excuses—I can readily forgive you.”

“ That is a word I delight to hear from your lips—although, in the present instance, I am wholly conscious of my innocence. Can you indeed imagine yourself the object of one unkind thought on my part ?”

“ There is *one* person, however,” observed Lady Willersdale, without seeming to notice Lord Barton’s tone of devotion—“ *one* person whom I cannot so easily pardon. Willersdale must have feared to trust my indiscretion with a secret, that appears known to all the world ; or worse, he must have supposed it likely to prove a source of regret to myself. How unjust—how unkind ! Nay, were even my vanity or my cupidity interested in the maintenance of his public honours, I am at present so little skilled in the value and importance of such dignities, that I know not where to fix my cares. Strange ! very strange,

that he should not intrust me with a fact which must be highly important in his estimation."

"I may be wrong, my dear Lady Willersdale; I may at least be premature."

"No; a thousand circumstances tend to confirm your intelligence. Lord Willersdale has scarcely spared an hour during the last fortnight from his official occupations;—he has been unusually pre-occupied and absent in his manner;—he has at times appeared restless and unhappy."

"Some domestic cause perhaps."

"*Domestic!* I sometimes doubt whether he is conscious of possessing a home! Oh, no!—a man whose mind has long been fevered by the strong excitement of public favour, by holding in his grasp the balance of national prosperity, must naturally find all meaner interests tame and vapid. It is scarcely worth while to lose time in rendering *one* person happy" added Helen, mournfully, "while the

happiness of a mighty population is dependent on our exertions."

"Do you know that you are talking *à cœur ouvert*?" replied Lord Barton, with a smile, "and I fear more so than you intend. *Mais n'importe*; your auditor is neither a Seymour nor a Melbourne. May I not even presume to regard your candour as a willing pledge of confidence?"

"You would deceive yourself. *Je ne confie pas mon secret,—il m'échappe.*—Is it not written, that few women can be trusted with their own secret?"

"That is a maxim of the Danvers school. By the way, her ladyship is not here to-night:—Wilmington is wandering about like an unclaimed spaniel."

"Honorina gives a fête to-morrow at Chiswick,—a sort of rural *dejeuné*: she is gone down this evening to see that the lawn is *en grande toilette* for the occasion—the roses *crépées* and perfumed."

“ I doubt whether Lady Danvers will welcome this change of ministry with the same good grace you have displayed.”

“ How little do you know my sister ! Politics are her *bête noire*.”

“ Politics—but not politicians. The present question becomes so personal to herself—her views—her interests—that it will put her magnanimity to the proof.”

“ Honoria’s interests?—Do you fancy she had any thoughts of being made under-secretary ? Honoria’s interests !—Beyond the choice of her ribbons at an election, or the arrival of a new *chaussure* from the Rue de la Paix, by the Ambassador’s bag, I do not think she feels a distinction between Whig or Tory, or entertains a notion of official importance.”

“ It is now for me to observe that you little know your sister. Except a few such *intrigantes* as Madame de Tencin, or Mrs. Masham, there has never existed a woman more covetous of ministerial influence.”

“ You are raving now in right good earnest,” exclaimed Helen, laughing in her turn ; “ and I can therefore appreciate the authenticity of your previous intelligence.”

“ I see you consider me over bold, or over mischievous, in speaking to you so undisguisedly ; but your own perceptions will shortly tend to enlighten you ; and then I trust you will do me the justice to whisper to yourself, “ Lord Barton was in the right.”

“ I shall not whisper it however in the *ton de caresse* you assume, if you should happen to prove Honoria in the wrong. I am persuaded that one of the greatest misfortunes occurring to men or women on their entrance into life, is to find themselves deceived by a friend in whom they have trusted. Such a discovery contracts the heart, and withers up the confiding frankness of youth. The favour of the world has perhaps won my affection too fervently towards human nature—and the recoil would be terrible. You cannot imagine,” she continued, with a

smile that invalidated the assertion, “you cannot imagine how bitterly I should hate you all, were I to be proved a dupe. *Au nom de dieu, ne me désenchantez pas ; je chéris avec ardeur une magie qui m’entoure d’illusions !*”

“*Soit !*” replied Lord Barton. “But remember, when the hour of waking arrives,—remember that you have a friend, *one* friend, who did not encourage the deception.—Ha! Harberton, I protest,” he continued, in a gayer tone: “look at him, Lady Willersdale, I beseech you ; observe how he is skulking behind yonder sofa to avoid us,—with the eyeglass of his cane hermetically sealed into his averted eye. I read in his ominous visage a confirmation of my intelligence. Right!—right!—the compass by which he is piloting his course from *fauteuil* to *fauteuil* has let me into all the secrets of the cabinet. A smile *en passant* to Mrs. L—— ; depend upon it, L. is the new secretary. A confidential aside to Lady Marden ; her Lord will have the board of trade. A profound bow

to the Duchess of Delvile; her misanthropic husband is our new *Premier* or there is no trust in man. When you see birds of such ill omen as Sir Ralph Harberton actively on the wing, you may predict a storm, without peril to your fame in augury."

"I must acknowledge that I have never before found myself for so many minutes in a room with Sir Ralph Harberton, without being honoured by his assiduities; but from whatever motive they may be withdrawn, I own I can spare them."

"And Melbourne's—and old Ross's—and"

"Nay, leave me some hope of one remaining friend."

"Wilmington then—if you have ever yet accorded him the distinction. Wilmington is of all the spoilt children of the world, the least spoiled. He loves fashion, and elegance, and refinement for their own sake; and because they form the atmosphere best suited to his temperament; but he would sacrifice nothing—

not a shade of self-esteem, not a particle of generosity of mind—for their attainment or retainment.”

“ And your friend Colonel Seymour.”

“ *My* friend Colonel Seymour—or Lady Willersdale’s.”

“ By your account Lady Willersdale *has* not a friend.”

“ Well, then, he shall be mine. *My* friend Colonel Seymour, considered *as* my friend, is one of the most honourable men in existence. I should buy his horse, or play his deal, without suspicion. His word is of sterling value, for he never commits himself by incontinence of tongue; his deeds are unimpeachable, for they are carefully regulated for the investigation of the curious. My friend Colonel Seymour can scarcely incur the suspicion of being interested, for he is heir to forty thousand a-year, and is therefore rich—in the confidence of the Jews; or the character of being ambitious—for one of the most ancient baronies of the realm devolves

to him on his uncle's death. My friend Colonel Seymour is one of the most brilliant men in London;—he flings about his *bon mots* with such an air of *nonchalance*, that we all busy ourselves with picking them up, and restoring them to the rightful owner; and thus their original importance becomes redoubled. He is also one of the handsomest,—yet the negligence of his dress intends us to believe him contemptuous of so unmanly a distinction. His whole soul is bent upon proving himself to be superior to himself; at one hour or other of the day he affects to despise every qualification, either physical or moral, of which he is possessed. Yet, with all these failings, asserted or implied, *my* friend Colonel Seymour is the most agreeable companion, and the most interesting acquaintance to be met with throughout the clubocracy of London. And now that *my* Seymour is pourtrayed in the full length of real life, will you permit me to describe your ladyship's?"—

“Not for twenty worlds!—I would not even

have you define the character of my poodle, for your discrimination is really awful; *heureusement les clairvoyans voyent souvent plus que la vérité.*”—

“Do not accuse *me* of a microscopic eye. I only point out an *extreme*, that you may hold fast the *mean*.”

“*En attendant*, Lady Anne waits to accompany you to the set forming in the other room; the *cotillon* is over at last. Till her return, you shall bequeath me as a legacy to Lady Marden, who is dying to show me some little affability under my present humiliations. I mean to divert myself a little with her condescension.”

“And I to amuse myself considerably with the conjunction of the rising and setting planets.”

It is presumptuous in a young man of twenty-seven, rich too, and handsome, and a peer, to determine with what or with whom he shall seek his pleasures in a ball-room. He is about as

much his own property as a blossom on a bush, or an ingot in a treasury. He belongs to the dowagers with whom he dines—to the ministers with whom he votes—and to their daughters, nieces, and wards, unto the remotest generation. He is destined to be smiled at, and expected to smile in return; he is fated to be talked at, and required to talk in return; his duties as a cavalier are peremptory; he must walk, and call carriages, as his destinies appoint; in fretful and impatient ignorance of who and who are flirting together in the adjoining saloon.

Lady Anne Gardner was pretty and sprightly, and sufficiently versed in the rights of partnership to concede no portion of Lord Barton's attention to the background proceedings of her lovely chaperon. A thousand important questions were charged on the galvanic battery of her smiling lips to startle him into assiduity. "Was he going to Lady Danvers's breakfast? Would it rain in the morning? Did he intend riding down to Chiswick?"

Would there be any dancing, any boat-racing, any fireworks? Was it true that the Duchess of Delvile had caricatured Lady Danvers dancing the *galopade* under a gigantic extinguisher? Had he heard that Mr. Melbourne was made Secretary of Legation to the Neapolitan Mission? Did he know that at Lady Danvers's *dejeuner* last year a near-sighted woman named Gray—a Lady Gray—had mistaken the yellow canal on the lawn for a gravel walk, stepped in, and drowned a whole fleet of water-lilies?" &c. &c. &c.

Lord Barton bowed, and alternately affirmed or negatived as the occasion demanded, and with excruciated politeness. He had observed Colonel Seymour shewing his white teeth and the tassel of his cane in an apology to Lady —— for the lateness of his appearance;—and lo! when he looked again, their hostess was still smiling in the keen-edged draught of air of her door-way station,—and Seymour was no longer visible. The *Queues de Chat* now be-

came trebly importunate; and the lengthening *chassés* insupportable. And when a timely relief enabled him to lead Lady Anne, pouting and *mutine*, to the place from whence he had decoyed her, he found the eclipsed Colonel stationed exactly as he expected, “close at the ear of Eve;”—lounging negligently on a portion of the sofa shared between Helen and Lady Marden; and with the most undisguised *dévouement* addressing to the former all his most diverting sallies, most piquant apothegms, most expressive flatteries. His intelligent countenance was animated by an air of triumph; and whatever trophies he might have won, all were evidently laid at the feet of Lady Willersdale; he seemed to rejoice in the occasion that presented itself of enhancing the value of his homage.

“*Tout est heur ou malheur dans ce monde.*”

Lord Barton read in Helen’s sparkling eyes and flushed cheek that the crafty Seymour had only too well timed his devotion—

That to her heart the fatal flattery went,

and he was also forced to acknowledge that the lavish prose of his own warning representations, had been *à propos* to nothing,—*pas même des bottes*. With Lady Anne still hanging upon his arm, he strove to ingratiate himself into their conversation; but he found that he was miserably *de trop*;—that he was made the butt of Seymour's sarcasms, and the foil to his brilliancy. At length, perplexed and mortified and grieved, Lord Barton retired from the fête, to seek consolation in moaning over Lord Willersdale's prospects, Helen's infatuation, and his own hopeless attachment. His grief and sympathy were alike profound and disinterested. *Mais à quoi bon en gémir?* —There was to be a *déjeuner dansant* on the morrow!

CHAPTER VIII.

Assur. Ce grand art d'imposer même à la renommée
Fut l'art qui sous son joug enchaina les esprits;
L'univers à ses pieds demeure encore surpris.
Que dis-je? sa beauté, ce flatteur avantage,
Fit adorer les lois qu'imposa son courage.

Cedar. Ce charme se dissipe,—ce pouvoir chancèle,
Son génie égaré semble s'éloigner d'elle!

Sémiramis.

A LETTER FROM LADY MORDAUNT TO HER
DAUGHTER.

Beech Park, July 28th.

My dear Helen,

A rumour has just reached us, through our dear Sir Robert, who is still attending his parliamentary duties in town, (although I find he has not been invited to dine in Hamilton Place these five weeks past,) that Lord Willersdale's administration is dissolved;

but as my daughter Lilfield says, the thing must be impossible; for you certainly would have thought it your duty to acquaint us with it in the first instance. The report runs that he has been giving offence in a certain quarter by his opinionativeness, and tenacious adherence to certain opinions, which no reasonable man could expect a certain person to regard with indulgence. I sincerely hope there may be no truth in these rumours, and that Lord W. may be able to console himself conscientiously under his public disgrace, by the reflection that no effort has been wanting on his part to retain his place; and that he has always sought by concessions, and a proper sense of royal supremacy, to ingratiate himself into the favour of his sovereign. One's first duty in life is towards one's family; and one's first duty towards one's family is to sacrifice all other considerations to its interests. That is what my daughter Lilfield calls acting upon principle.

Whether or not my Lord has been to blame in this matter—and who can say?—I must acknowledge that the change in his prospects has opened my eyes to a great many things. So much as Sir Stephen has always said to me about the advantages of your marriage—such a good match as every body called it—I must say I think you might have contrived that something should be done for your brothers before this. There is poor Jack, with his money lodged for a Company these four months—and nothing done. There is William grumbling at his curacy, with every chimney in the glebe-house smoking, and half his parishioners gone over to the meeting house—and nothing done. Poor Anna-Maria assures me she wrote to you several times about getting her nurse's husband into the Customs; and Sir Herbert Gray's tutor only wanted a word from Lord Willersdale to get made chaplain to the infirmary at Sierra Leone—yet nothing has been done for either. And now I should like to know what chance we

have?—My dear, I do not blame *you*;—you are young and thoughtless; but I must say that a little more zeal would not have been amiss. As my daughter Lilfield says, I trust you may never have cause to repent your negligence towards your own family on this occasion. Anna-Maria indeed always predicted evil from your extreme intimacy with Lady Danvers; we all know what she is!—and the defilement of pitch is proverbial from the days of St. Paul.

I trust, my dear Lady Willersdale, that you are still on friendly terms with that Colonel Seymour, of whom I saw so much during my visits to Hamilton Place. He is a very gentlemanly man, and your brother's friend; and between ourselves, his interest with the Delvilles may still do something for Jack or William. He is expected down at Delville Castle for the Races, and my daughter Lilfield will omit no occasion of treating him with proper attention. Indeed, as she often observes, the Duchess expects to be seconded by Beech Park on all pub-

lic occasions ; it would be scarcely fair if one of the first seats in the county were to be deficient in deference and hospitality towards the family of its Lord Lieutenant.

I trust you will lose no time in informing us how far your future plans may be influenced by Lord Willersdale's unfortunate situation. I think he must by this time lament the extravagant magnificence with which he furnished his house in town ; for you will hardly like to remain there in the present state of public opinion towards him. It was only last week I was describing to Anna-Maria those Persian divans in your dressing room ; and she assures me that there is no such thing at Delvile Castle. We agreed that such a waste for idle show was all folly ; but then, as I very honestly told her, Lord Willersdale never consulted either Sir Stephen or myself respecting the most trifling of his domestic arrangements ; and I really think that *our* experience in housekeeping might have afforded him some useful hints.

The Boxfield races begin on Monday next ; and on Saturday night we expect dear Sir Robert, with two turtle and a cook, from town. Our party in the house will consist of five of the Beaumont family, Sir Thomas and Lady Botherum, and Sir Richard and Lady De Corum ; Sir Cæsar Meyrick, General Ross, Judge Logic and his nephew, and several other persons of fashion and consequence. Dear Anna-Maria retains her usual sweet composure in the midst of all these anxieties ; and although the house-steward, and the bailiff, and the housekeeper, are continually coming to consult her, she attends the dinner in the school-room, and morning prayers in the steward's-room, just as if no company was expected. But then, as I often observe to Sir Stephen, there is no establishment regulated like that at Beech Park ; I wish all my daughters would take pattern by Lady Lilfield. By the way, poor Jane's prospects are sadly altered by this change in the administration, but we must hope for the best. As I write

under cover, I need not apologize for this long letter, to which I expect an explicit answer as early as convenient ; being

Your affectionate Mother,

ANNA M. MORDAUNT.

Burn this epistle.

Lady Willersdale's first movement on arriving at the close of this humiliating maternal missive, was to tear it in as many pieces as might defy the decyphrement of Dr. Young or Mr. Seyffarth, or " the maid in the other room ;" her next was to throw herself into a chair and weep bitterly. It was not that she now discovered for the first time the hollowness of her parent's hearts, or the insolent selfishness of her elder sister ; it was not that she had ever mistaken the expectations entertained by her whole family from her union with Lord Willersdale ;—it was that *they* should prove the first to exult in his comparative degradation, and that there was not one, *not one* throughout her numerous kindred, to whom she could turn in that or any future emergency of

her life, for counsel and sympathy. “ How painfully and how dangerously am I alone,” said she, mournfully gazing on her gorgeous solitude. “ Oh ! what were the worth of a friend on whose mind I could rely for support, to whose heart I could address myself for consolation !”

A magnolia which at that moment fell from her bosom, recalled to her thoughts the eager protestations of exclusive regard with which it had that morning been presented to her acceptance, in the shrubbery of Lord Danvers’s villa. She blushed on recollecting that she had been compelled to listen to professions that could not have been made in the presence of a third person. With a shuddering of horror she flung away the flower ; and turned her remembrances to Lord Barton’s insinuations of the preceding night. She thought him tiresome, prosing, officious ; but she knew him to be of unimpeachable veracity ; and trembled to reflect upon the distinction he had marked between the world’s

Colonel Seymour, and Lady Willersdale's. She trembled—for she had become conscious that evening, for the first time, that he addressed her in terms very different from those he employed in general society; and very different from any in which others presumed to address her. She felt that she had not sufficiently resented the innovation. She was disgusted with him—with herself—with the whole world!

Lady Mordaunt's homely documentations had arrived at a moment peculiarly unpropitious to their favourable reception. On her return from the ball of the night before, a few hurried lines from Lord Willersdale had commissioned her to make his excuses to his sister for the following day; adding that he had retired to bed with a headache, and should be compelled to return to Downing Street at too early an hour to admit of their meeting. Helen, who was eager for a confirmation of the tidings that had just reached her ears, could scarcely

restrain her inclination to disturb her husband with five minutes' conversation. But Lord Willersdale's apartments were separated from her own by a private staircase, and an antichamber inhabited by his valet; she felt that her intrusion might be importunate under the pressure of anxieties which must at that moment agitate the retiring minister. She betook herself therefore to her rest, unsatisfied upon a point which she believed vital to her happiness; and when she awoke in the morning, with the summer sun laughing through her muslin draperies, and beheld Mademoiselle Florentine in the act of exhibiting the filmy *robe à la contadina*, and enchanting *chapeau à jour*, which Maradan had imagined for her *toilette de déjeûné*, she could remember nothing but that a *fête champêtre* awaited her on the banks of the Thames. Refreshed by sleep, and gladdened by the impulses of youth and health, she had banished all inquietude from her heart. Kings, ministers, levees, and privy councils, were become of

secondary moment in her estimation; and if the idea of a court had glanced athwart her mind, it would have been as a region of lappets and formality, whence the loves and the graces were excluded by the lord in waiting, or by an order from the lord chamberlain's office.

The weather, too, was as auspicious as her own joyous mood. When she arrived at the scene of the morning's revels, she found the Thames sparkling in the sunshine like a stream of diamonds; and the lawn, which shelved down to its waters with shrubberies and *bosquets* of choice shrubs,—bright, and blossomy, and fragrant as a poet's dream of Tempe. The summer air had never surrounded her before with so exquisite a sense of enjoyment, nor the turf appeared so green, nor the flowers so glowing in their hues; for she had never been so long an inmate of the crowded and noisome streets of the metropolis. She turned her cheek towards the river breezes on entering the trim and verdant lawns of Burwood;

and her heart bounded with a vague consciousness of delight, as the swell of a band of wind instruments pealed from a group of acacia trees, sheeted with clusters of snowy flowers.

Helen had promised Lady Danvers to be with her early in the day, in order to assist in her survey of the arrangements of the *fête*. Fortunately she was enabled to grace her criticisms with acclamations of genuine rapture; for Honoria was in no humour for opposition. They traversed together the flowery glades glittering with fountains—the shadowy walks winding between groups of pine, and larch, and cedar; they admired the flush of roses scattered through the *bosquets*, and the pendent bloom of many an exotic parasite trailing its languid length from trellice to trellice. They visited the temporary rooms, and saw that all was well distributed; applauding the peremptory activity of the inimitable John Gunter, as he bustled amid his pyramids of gold paper, and his triumphal arches of foil.

Lady Willersdale pronounced, with conscientious truth, that an air of enchantment prevailed over the whole scene; and that nothing had been neglected which might enhance the enjoyments of the day. A sigh from her companion seemed a sort of melancholy echo to the assertion!—A sigh from Honoria! the happy, thoughtless, heartless Honoria!—Lady Willersdale turned hastily round to ascertain whether her ears had not deceived her; but she read upon the harassed countenance of Lady Danvers, only a confirmation of her suspicions. Yet she had never seen her look fairer, nor more *récherchée* in her *toilette*; no art had been spared to adorn her, no effort to retain her accustomed *air d'enjouement*. For the first time, however, nature prevailed; and the preoccupation of her mind was manifested upon every vacant feature.

“My dearest Honoria!” rashly exclaimed Lady Willersdale, “I could almost believe that you have heard, and heard with vexation the

news which has so much delighted *me*. I am assured that Willersdale is once more his own master; congratulate us both, and do not let me suppose for a moment that you regret his paltry honours."

She looked a second time towards Lady Danvers as she spoke; and her whole heart seemed to wither within her, at sight of the terrific expression of malice, and hatred, and suppressed fury which, with the rapidity of lightning, glared upon that beautiful countenance. Helen recoiled with horror from her side; for she felt as if a chasm of destruction were opening at her feet! In another minute Honoria's gentlest accents were murmuring in her ears; and when she attempted to ascertain whether tones so enchantingly tender could really issue from lips distorted by a struggle of evil passions, the spectacle had disappeared. Smiles hovered upon Honoria's cheek; nor had the secret storm left a single trace of its tran-

sitory violence. Lady Willersdale felt stunned and sickened, like a person awaking from the dream that has unconsciously beguiled him forth from his tranquil midnight couch !

“ *Congratulate you !*” exclaimed Lady Danvers, as if unobservant of her astonishment ; “ and so I do, my dear, with all my heart. Frederick, who accepted office only in compliance with the personal and pressing request of his sovereign, abandons it when the services required at his hands, become incompatible with his rigid sense of honour. He derived no distinction from his temporary situation, and may take his leave of Downing Street, regretting only the time that he has lavished within its ungrateful walls. *Quant à nous*, who are neither mothers of the Gracchi, nor wives to Brutus, we may thank the bountiful stars which, unclasping the golden fetters of state from our limbs, have set us at liberty to roam the world over—a woman’s dearest privi-

lege; and given us unshackled leisure for *déjeûners*, and balls, and all the excesses of our age and sex and season."

"I can scarcely imagine in what manner *your* excesses, or *your* wanderings can be influenced by the ins and outs."

"You will learn, child, you will learn—and perhaps too soon," replied Lady Danvers in a hurried manner, as she struck the little Bréquet repeater in her bosom. "Four o'clock, and no soul arrived yet."

"I saw a few parties scattered over the southern lawn towards the river."

"Yes! and if they had been under its waters they would have been nothing missed in the order of my entertainment—the Darleys only, and a few purblind dowagers from the villas in the neighbourhood."

"Where is Lord Danvers?"

"At Hastings, with the girls and their governess; his flight always indicates the approach of the enemy. Danvers's travelling car-

riage may be unfailingly seen on the road the day preceding one of my *fêtes* ; he is a sort of herald whom I send forth to announce that I am ‘ at home.’ You look as if you longed to say, that no one seems eager upon the present occasion, to profit by the announcement. Say it, my dear Helen—pray do not spare me; you will find that no one just now applauds your forbearance.”

A few parties entering as she spoke, seemed for an instant to divert Lady Danvers’s attention, and subdue her bitterness of feeling. Group after group made its appearance, and compliments were to be received and answered, and explanations required and given. For the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, the fair hostess was compelled to rehearse by whom the villa was originally built, of whom purchased, by whose counsels repaired, for the edification of Lord Quiz, or Lady Bore ; but it was the first time, the *very* first time, she had felt their frivolous curiosity to be an opportune relief.

She was anxious to talk *to* every body, *of* every thing ; and she had been so long unused to the tedium of giving up her attention to the prosing of the dull and the superannuated, that the novelty of the alternative served in some degree to amuse her lively fancy.

Although Lord Willersdale's wife had been indifferent and blind to the tempest gathering in the political atmosphere, his sister had carefully noted every approaching cloud, every wavering breath by which the vane of public opinion had been successively agitated. She had heard the first scarcely audible growl of distant thunder which menaced his popularity ; she had seen the speck in the horizon, which promised to become an overwhelming storm ; and devoting herself in the first instance to the task of appeasing its violence by the operation of many a secret engine, by artful flatteries to opposing spirits, and unsuspected bribery in meaner, but not less efficient quarters, she had succeeded for a time in retarding the crisis.

Her second effort—but it was the result of her desperation—was to mark by the general carelessness of her deportment, by increased dissipation, and added brilliancy of existence, her utter indifference to the state of the political world. From the most diplomatic silence upon the public questions of the day, Lady Danvers suddenly expanded into an equally remarkable loquacity of indiscretion. No sooner had she ascertained that the game was up, and that its eventual fortunes would soon declare themselves, than her laugh against those interested in its destiny, became pointed by the bitterest derision. She began to speak in epigram, and look in caricature; her mimicry, and parodies, and seemingly unstudied *moquerie* appeared to lead, rather than to follow, the bent of public opinion.

But that mighty colloquial weapon, untranslatableably called *persiflage*, is so far unworthy of trust, that it is powerful only while opposed to the weighty sabre of argument. The moment

its light warfare is met *in kind*, the spell of its success is lost. The world began, in its turn, to jeer and epigrammatize the falling party ; and Honoria's only remaining buckler of defence, was to turn a hardened front of defiance towards the enemy.

Like many other persons whose observation is directed towards objects of magnitude, Lord Willersdale possessed a degree of insensibility towards the minor ones immediately connected with his own interests, wholly incomprehensible to those with whom the puerilities of domestic life are all in all. His keen gaze could penetrate the mysteries of foreign courts, or detect the obscure intrigues originating the commotions of another hemisphere. He could calculate upon the interested views of a turbaned financier within the seven towers ; or defeat the machinations of some stirring spirit on the banks of the Abo ; but the intrigues that were operating within his own family—the kindred influence by which his patronage was appropriated, and his

coalescence effected, remained meanwhile an unsuspected mystery. He saw his sister as the world saw her—beautiful, brilliant, bewitching; he admired her bright intelligence, and prized her affection; but he dreamed not that her success in society was redoubled by the universal observation of her power over himself; and that her intimacy was chiefly courted by those, who looked upon it as the securest avenue to his own friendship. He knew that he had never confided a single secret to her ear; but he did *not* know that in the frankness of his intercourse with his sister, every thought that occupied his mind, and every feeling that swayed his heart, became open to her investigation; that her ready tact mastered his dawning projects in their birth; and that many a decision of the cabinet had been partly instigated by the invisible ascendancy of Honoria Danvers!

The penetration of the world had in this instance outstepped his own; and the incense of society was laid upon the true altar. Whenever

the tonant divinity was to be won, the forger of his bolts was secretly propitiated ; it was Lady Danvers who was followed, and flattered, and sued ; it was Honoria who basked in the sunshine of popular favour. During a temporary absence from her side, indeed, Lord Willersdale had sufficiently recovered his free-agency to surrender the mastership of his feelings to a nearer and dearer hand ;—he had married ! and his indignant sister believed her empire to be shaken to its basis. But her fears were quickly relieved by the guileless indifference manifested by Helen Mordaunt to all the arts of interested rivalry ; and the re-assured manœuvrer instantly determined to strengthen her influence by association, and reinforce her power by a still more powerful tie. From the moment of her brother's marriage, her influence over his mind had been redoubled.

Notwithstanding her share in the universal vanity of her sex, and a profound consciousness of her own personal gifts and endowments,

Lady Danvers had never blinded herself to the true origin of her power in society, of her prodigious ascendancy in the world. Nay,

So much knowledge of ourselves there lies
Cored after all in our complacencies,

that she was no less conscious of the nature of her tenure on the throne of fashion, than of her own supreme attachment to its prerogative. She knew that it was there, even in that hollow pomp of vice, and folly, and display, that her heart was garnered up; that it was amid its empty pageants that “either she must live or have no life.” It was to *power*—power in its meanest and most conventional sense, she had sacrificed her domestic affections, her peace of mind, her time, her health, her ease, her trust in the mercy of God!—

To such a woman, and actuated by so keen an animation of human passion, the approach of a day of reckoning was terrible indeed. To be precipitated from the pinnacle of her pride, was to fall into utter inanition. A life of compara-

tive obscurity was, in Lady Danvers's estimation, worse than the utter darkness of the grave.

And the day *was* come—the gloom had already gathered around her path. She stood upon her decorated lawn, lovely and graceful, and exquisitely fashioned as ever; yet no votive whisper approached her ear—no doating smile fixed its adulation upon her face—no venal crowd rushed eagerly towards her gates—no glittering mob of fashionable parasites stunned her with the acclamations of their rapture. Excuse after excuse, apology after apology, absence after absence, overcame her with the consciousness of degradation. And soon the presence of the few became more painful and perplexing than the absence of the many. The over-loaded tables, the vacant seats, the scattered bands whose music no dancers obeyed; the mummers and posture-masters, whose efforts no spectator applauded; the boatmen in their liveried array, vainly waiting for a freight; the train of expectant domestics of all nations, and languages,

and costumes, patiently expectant of announcements which tasked not their exertions; the rival with her hypocritical air of sympathy, and repressed smile; the enemy with his callous sneer; the traitor attempting, by formal civility, to compromise his defection; the scornful with their contempt; the virtuous with their pity, all seemed planted there to swell the tide of Lady Danvers's mortifications! Lady Willersdale frankly acknowledged herself deeply grieved and vexed that her promised day of pleasure had deceived her expectations; but Lady Danvers smiled, and jested, and appeared delighted by every fresh mischance; she dared not give way to a single natural feeling, for she trembled lest her agony should betray that the fabric which had busied her whole life in its construction, was crumbling away beneath her feet!

“What a charming morning, my dearest Lady Danvers,” exclaimed Mrs. Beaumont, following the agitated hostess through one of her

desolate conservatories. “ *Il n’y a que vous qui soyez toujours en bonheur.* Nay, I was so persuaded yours would be the best thing of the season, that I put off my journey into Durham expressly to enjoy it. I am going to my cousins—the Lilfields. Family connexion, and all that sort of thing, must be kept up; otherwise—but as Lady Lilfield, herself, often observes, ‘few of us are of sufficient importance to stand alone in the world as noun substantives; we derive our consequence more or less from our adjectives and conjunctions,’ ha, ha, ha! and I am so diffident of *my* personal consequence, that I cling even to a Durham cousinship for support; ha, ha, ha!”

“ Lady Lilfield’s syntax is too philosophical for my comprehension,” replied Lady Danvers, haughtily: “ I rejoice, however, that she hugs herself in the safety of her parasitical existence; for she and her pompous clan always remind me of the Roman fasces—a bundle of sticks united into an emblem of power.”

“ *Brava! Brava!* ” exclaimed Mr. Brill, a hanger on of Lady Danvers’s, who had punned, and fetched, and carried himself into some degree of notoriety in the fashionable world. “ Your Ladyship’s wit is quite *fascinating!* ”

“ Ah! my dear Mr. Brill! ” exclaimed Mrs. Beaumont, turning round, “ do I see you here, after all! I heard you assuring the Duchess of Delvile last night, that you had already made your excuses to Lady Danvers; and did not even *that* concession persuade her to procure you a ticket for Lady Alberville’s Round Table? or, did she spare you to us, as the experienced anglers throw back the small fish into the river they have rifled? ”

Lady Danvers walked rapidly along the marble path of the orangery, but her persecutor followed; brushing, at every step, the delicious blossoms from the overloaded trees.

“ Have you heard of this little *impromptu* affair of Lady Alberville’s? It was only imagined at the last Almack’s; and I am told that

it will be a *véritable féerie*: King Arthur's court with appropriate costumes; a banquet in the beautiful lime-wood at Rosemount; our dear duchess to personate the lovely Genevra, and Clarence Wilmington to be her Lancelot! It will be positively enchanting! I rather believe there is some sort of a little rehearsal this morning; for as I drove past the Rosemount avenue, I saw quite a mob of carriages, and Wilmington's cabriolet met me near the first turnpike. I concluded it had left him here; but as I do not see him, I suppose he is *en grande répétition* with the Lady of the Lake. By the way, my dear Lady Danvers, pray guess what parts have been assigned to Sir Ralph Harberton and Melbourne in the pageant?"

"Of King Arthur's court? Those of Tom Thumb and Lord Grizzle, I should imagine."

"Oh! you are thinking of the farce; very natural—very natural; so much humour as you can yourself display at times! but Lady Alberville's *fête* is a masque of chivalry; the cos-

tumes are to be regulated under the direction of Dr. Ancient-Armour Meyrick; and the chorusses have been expressly written by Mr. I'd-be-a-Butterfly Bayley. Every department will be presided by the Master of its art."

"And who is to be master of the Duchess of Delville's art?"

"His most gracious Majesty! I conclude you are aware that his grace is now the servant of our sovereign lord the King; and that Harberton, and Melbourne, and several of our old friends, have also places in the new administration."

"It appears then that Rosemount has become a *servants' hall*."

"By the same rule Burwood might be called a *still room* this morning."

"Antonio!" exclaimed Lady Danvers to one of her pages,—“beg Mr. Brill will come to me for a moment, and without losing a moment—or he will be too late for Mrs. Beaumont's next pun”

“How cheering it is to see Lady Danvers in such excellent spirits,” observed Mrs. Beaumont in a sympathizing tone to Lady Dovetail, who had accidentally interposed between them. “From what they were saying last night I scarcely expected it. I promised to look in at Rosemount on my return; and I shall be delighted to carry the news of her philosophical equanimity. For my part, I was always aware that she had abandoned

All meaner things

To low ambition and the pride of kings.”

“*Epris de vos vertus je les sais égaler,*” replied Lady Danvers, rushing from the conservatory, and conscious that her self-command was beginning to forsake her: “Mr. Brill,—do me the favour to desire Desvoisins will serve the *déjeûné*; and beg he will not oppress us with a whole hecatomb; tell him—for who knows it better than yourself—that ‘*Dodone inconsulté ne rend plus d’oracles!*’—that our votaries have removed their altars to the shrine

of a more profitable goddess.—Spare me your pun, sir ;—you cannot be more aware than I am, that you have all *altared* for the better.”

“ My dear Lady Danvers, can you believe it possible——”

“ I believe nothing to be possible. Incredulity is the resource, they say, of a weak mind. They lie, sir ;—it is the stronghold of an experienced one.”

“ It shall be what you please, provided you will accept my arm and accompany me to the dining-room.”

“ Pitied by Mrs. Beaumont—patronized by Mr. Brill ! But ’tis all very well—it hath ‘ pleased Heaven to rain all sorts of plagues on me !’ I accept your protection, sir !—and who shall say that Honoria Danvers is not sufficiently humbled.”

Meanwhile Lady Willersdale, to whom the greater part of what was passing around her remained an inexplicable enigma, vainly addressed herself to the task of amusing the scat-

tered guests whom Lady Danvers's abstraction and disorder abandoned to her efforts; and although she could by no means imagine the source of the constrained smiles, and factitious politeness with which her courtesy was received, she finally succeeded in imparting some slight degree of cordiality unto the "fools who came to scoff." Helen was so young, so fair, so mild, so simple, that no one could for a moment accuse *her* of undue assumption, nor any one exult in *her* fall. The most obdurate heart became sensible to her insinuating gentleness; and more than one *frondeur* was heard to observe that Lord Willersdale's retirement would be like the pious hermit's retreat—

A grotto, with an angel for its guest!

The twilight came at last to soothe her weariness, and to bring the promise of the closing curtain to Honoria's scene of "excellent dissembling." Mimic glow worms were beginning to shed their glimmering lustre through the shrubberies; and Vertpré who had been

engaged to display her inimitable art, or rather nature, on the miniature boards of the Burwood Theatre, was beginning to creep through the stealthy *agaceries* of her *Femme Chatte*; when Lady Willersdale, having accepted the respectable convoy of Sir Cæsar Meyrick to secure a seat, found her attention suddenly claimed by the vehement assiduities of Colonel Seymour. He had just escaped, he said, from Lady Alberville's Round Table, and only in the earnest hope of finding himself in time for a waltz, or a little promenade with her ladyship. He had believed her out of town; and having that moment heard from Mrs. Beaumont of her presence at Lady Danvers's *fête*—or *fête manquée*, he had possessed himself of the first anonymous cabriolet he could stop at the gates of Rosemount, to fly to her feet. Would she dance—would she waltz—would she smile—would she only glance—in acceptance of his exertions? Would she at least permit him to sit and applaud Vertpré by her side? Would she allow him to

offer her the magnolia which Lady Alberville had presented to him as to her chosen knight? Would she at all events deign to believe that every gift and every trophy he could command would be rendered by anticipation an homage to herself?"—

Lady Willersdale was startled, and almost alarmed by his unwonted vehemence. She had met Colonel Seymour at every ball for the last seven weeks; she had been continually his companion and chosen partner; she had even been struck by the impassive but profound *dévouement* which constantly retained him by her side. But she was wholly unprepared for this vehement burst of—she scarcely yet knew how to term it;—and partly from gratitude for his flatteringly-timed courtesy, and partly from curiosity as to its immediate motive, she readily accepted his arm to saunter once more among the illuminated shrubberies of Burwood.

CHAPTER IX.

Rien de plus pittoresque que l'arrangement de cette fête. Tous les matelots étaient vêtus avec des couleurs vives, et bien contrastées ; des voix parfaitement justes se faisaient entendre dans le lointain, et les instrumens se répondaient d'échos en échos. L'air qu'on respirait était ravissant, et pénétrait l'ame d'un sentiment de joie. Ailleurs c'est la vie qui ne suffit pas aux facultés de l'ame ; ici ce sont les facultés de l'ame qui ne suffisent pas à la vie, et la surabondance des sensations inspire une rêverse indolence.

Corinne.

“ THERE they go ! ” exclaimed Mr. Brill to the discomfited Sir Cæsar—“ a setting sun and a rising star ! an ominous conjunction ! ”

“ Star ! — is there any idea of Willersdale's having the vacant Garter ? ”

“ My dear Sir Cæsar, you should have made

that inquiry last week ; the question of to-day regards his impeachment.”

“ Impeachment ! ” exclaimed Lord Barton, who had been lingering near Lady Willersdale during the whole morning, in hopes of attracting her notice, but without success : “ impeachment ! —does any suspicion of moral turpitude attach itself to Willersdale’s conduct ? ”

“ *Vous voulez m’interpréter au pied de la lettre !* ” said Brill, coolly picking his teeth, after incidentally yielding his tribute of applause to one of Vertpré’s brilliant *finesses*. “ But we English are apt to mistake reverse of wrong for right. We set up a molten image for our especial worship ; and when we discover that this god of our own creation is nothing better than a powerless idol, we revenge ourselves by breaking it in pieces like a potter’s vessel. We cry up authors, artists, statesmen, according to the suggestions of our own wanton caprice ; and when we find their real stature below the arbitrary standard of our imagination, we dash them

to the earth in retribution of the blunder. Lord Willersdale has been too long elevated into supremacy, not to be plunged down to-day into some low abyss of infamy. He has been publicly confessed a great orator, a great patriot;—we shall find him dubbed a traitor and a charlatan in all the Sunday papers of next week.”

“ Oh ! if it be only the reaction of the public mind you apprehend, it will ‘ turn and turn again ; and it is obedient, sir, very obedient.’ The Delvile administration will be brief as a mayoralty.”

“ So I suppose ; for I see that Lady Willersdale and the Duke of Delvile’s nephew have already effected a coalition.”

Meanwhile Colonel Seymonr, after having conducted Lady Willersdale with seeming carelessness through every group, and beside every individual to whom he wished to render their intimacy apparent, began at length to consult his own inclinations. Hastily traversing the embowered shrubberies of the villa, which were all

as familiar to him as to his companion, he gradually drew her towards the deserted banks of the river; persuading her to rest herself on a marble bench inserted into their shelving turf. A few beech trees overhung this chosen spot; and as the tide had now risen to its utmost height, the waters rippling in the moonlight, plashed against the steps of the seat. Occasionally a passing boat, attracted by the brilliant illumination of the gardens, paused in delighted admiration opposite to the groves of Burwood; while the measured monotony of its oars seemed beating in time to the light strains resounding from the lawn. The evening dew had redoubled the fragrance of the flowery parterres and blossomed *bosquets*; and the summer wind, breathing through the rustling branches of the beech-trees above, bore the united charm upon its refreshing breezes. Every enchantment that art or nature could effect, was lavishly poured upon the scene around; every thing was there which could delight the multitude. But the marble

retreat selected by the artful Seymour, was possessed of a qualification which surpassed all the rest; it was *solitary* in the midst of a crowd—it was sequestered from approach, even while participating in the pleasures of the more populous regions of the garden.

“This is as I could wish,” said he, seating himself by Helen, who had thrown herself, wearied and dispirited, upon the bench: “I have been feeling that I would give worlds for a few minutes’ uninterrupted conversation with you; and the occasion offers itself to my desire, enhanced by a thousand unhopd advantages.”

“I trust you will be satisfied with monologue instead of dialogue,” replied Helen, faintly smiling; “for I am tired past reply, and past my patience.”

“*De mieux en mieux !* dearest Lady Willersdale. I own I want to talk to you myself, and *of* myself. *J’ai à commencer de loin,—de très loin.* Will you be so far patient as at least to listen?”

“Why should either of us be troubled with discourse, this delightful *far niente* evening, while we have the echoes of yonder bugles, and the murmuring of the water? Believe me, it is a waste of voice to *talk* on such a night—a night rivalling that of Portia’s return!”

“You have, I perceive, a keen and exquisite sense of epicurean enjoyment. For myself, I own I am apt to place a contemplative silence by the side of those we love, as among the first of human pleasures. My fancy is of a highly creative order, yet it can devise no higher tone of gratification than that arising from a scene—an hour like this—with Lady Willersdale for its companion.”

“Lady Willersdale thanks your gallantry, such as it is. A more meritorious supposition would have been to find some bleak and barren moor, equally embellished by her society.”

“That would have been a poetic license, and I confine myself to prose. No! I never could enter into the philosophy of those men who do

not shrink from surrounding the woman they love with difficulties and privations. To me, love in a palace is an heroic passion—and love in a cottage the acmé of human selfishness.”

“Your theory is at least original.”

“It is personally and practically my own. Actuated by its influence I have renounced some of the dearest projects of my life.”

“Je vois que vous vous retournerez vers ce lointain dont vous m’avez menacé ! Mais à quoi bon les réminiscences ? Le tems qui nous échappe contient aussi son beau moment ; pourquoi donc chercher son bonheur dans les souvenirs ?”

“Ah ! you already dread the avowals of my ‘*lointain* ;’ you are aware how deeply you have influenced its happiness ; you will not encourage my confession.”

“Confession without absolution is a bootless labour.”

“The first is a task for *me* ; the second lies wholly in your own power.”

“Have I not assured you that I am too indolent for any but oral exertion to-night.”

“Yet you attempt to silence me; to drive me back on every approach to the subject nearest my heart! I have already frequently sought occasions to unburthen my mind of its load of anxieties; and still and ever your reserve has prevailed against me. But I see you to-night dejected by the first slights of a life of comparative obscurity. You are unhappy, Helen—do not deny it! and now is my best opportunity of telling you that *I* too have suffered, and suffered for your sake; and that”—

Lady Willersdale, who had been startled by the familiar appellation employed by Colonel Seymour, now rose with the intention of returning to the theatre, or at least to the protection of society. But her hand was eagerly seized;—her patience implored in a tone of command;—and in another minute she found herself almost forcibly reseated by Colonel Seymour’s side, and compelled to listen to his eager adjurations.

He spoke in a low, rapid, earnest tone ; but the flatteries, the adulation, the seeming devotion of soul which tempered his accents, deprived not his recital of its true offence in the ears of his trembling auditress.

“ You shrink from me,” he said ; “ you tremble at my vehemence ! Yet wherefore ?— I, who have so long mastered my secret—so long restrained within my bosom the impulses which have formed its sole existence—so long lived in your presence with the calm self-government of indifference—what have you to fear from me in a scene like this, where crowds are ready to obey your call ? I am no enthusiast, Helen ! no impassioned madman, who for the joy of calling you mine, would rush into these waters at our feet to expiate my folly and my crime ;—no, no ! I am but the cold, callous, slave of the expediencies of society. The world—*our* world, contains *my* oracles ; I would as soon incur the stain of some mortal sin, as the laugh of St. James’s Street. You cease to trem-

ble, Lady Willersdale; you are in the right; it is not from a mere worldling like me that outrage or insult is to be apprehended. One word, however—one question in preliminary of my story. Can it be possible that you have remained till now in ignorance of my passionate attachment?"

"Colonel Seymour," replied Helen, faintly, "you assured me, but now, that I had no insult to dread at your hands; yet what else can you purpose by such an inquiry."

"The cant of your sex!" exclaimed Seymour—"of your sex—which affects to *resent* the sacrifice of our hearts, souls, lives—our earthly and immortal happiness—for the brief recompense of basking one moment in its smiles! Helen, you ought to be above the profession of such shallow morality. But no matter! You choose me to suppose that you have been blind to my preference—my fond, my overweening love; and I will believe *that*, and yet more at your bidding. But you know it *now*; you have now heard my declaration in all the uncompro-

mising and earnest boldness of truth; and again I repeat it—I love you better than the whole world ;—better, far better, than myself !”

Lady Willersdale covered her face with her hands and wept with anger and consternation. But she knew that escape was impossible, and resentment fruitless.

“ When I first saw you,” he resumed, “ surrounded by all the common place vulgarity of Mordaunt-Park, your elegance of form and soul overlooked by your family, and forming a mere component part of a group of the most ordinary and unattractive character—I felt startled, and even awed, as one who finds some precious jewel in his path. Versed as I was in the axioms of the world, hardened by the profaning touch of vice, I scarcely dared approach a being gifted with the beauty and the purity of an angel. I beheld in you at once the loveliness of a woman, and the simplicity of a child.”

Helen listened through her tears.

“ I spoke of you to your brother—*my friend* I think he was called—or rather I forced him to speak of *you* ; and all my presentiments of the superiority of your character, were fully justified. ‘ My sister Lilfield cants me dead,’ said Jack—‘ my sister Gray bores me to extinction ; but Helen is the sweetest creature breathing.’ And you *were* the sweetest creature,—while I alone seemed conscious of the fact. Every night you used to sit singing the savageness out of your humdrum bears of neighbours, with such untiring patience ; and every night, while I seemed to doze in glorious stupefaction over the newspaper, ‘ I took in strains’—but I will not affect the sentimentality of a quotation ; I was too much in earnest for poetry.”

“ And yet,” said Helen gently, and scarcely conscious that she was speaking, “ and yet you scarcely ever addressed me. You seemed to regard me as a child ; a fit object for your

good nature, but unworthy your conversation or confidence."

"There was but one manner, in which, had I broken the ice, my feelings would have permitted me to speak. I could only have confessed my dawning sentiments, and striven to excite your affections in return; and what would that have availed to either? I was too poor to marry, too tender of your interests to wish to entangle you in a long and harassing engagement. It is true that rank and fortune will crown my eventual destiny: but it is only by death that my aunts and uncles will consent to make me rich; and in the meantime, they leave me to the pride and the poverty of a miserable younger brother. Sometimes, indeed, I thought of representing my prospects and their misery to the Duke of Delvile; whose influence with his sister, Lady Gertrude, might have tempted her to forestal her generosity. But I knew that the very name of Mordaunt

would have sealed their hearts against me. Your elder brother, encased as he is against giving offence in the buff-coat of utter insignificance—shuffling, cringing, and bending his mean obeisances to the uttermost cousin of the uttermost blockhead in the peerage,—has yet contrived to draw upon himself the abhorrence of the whole house of Wentworth. He has successfully defied it in a contested election! Forgive me, Helen, that I speak of him thus; forgive me!—but you little know how bitterly his luckless interference with my hopes has tintured the current of my feelings. Had he borne the burthen of his leaden eloquence to some other hustings, he would have remained, in my estimation, the inoffensive paltry being I used to think him at Eton and at Oxford.”

“Colonel Seymour,” exclaimed Helen with indignation,—“you have no right to aggravate your offences towards myself, by these insolent comments on my family.”

“You say truly, Lady Willersdale—I *have* no right. My sleepless nights—my days of

wretchedness—the excesses into which I have been driven to escape from the solitude of an agonized soul—these—these—afford me no right to vent the clamours of my hatred upon those who sold you to the arms of a higher bidder—who stole you for ever from my hopes to render you the bait of their venal angling. Yes!—Helen, I know it all; you have been sacrificed to a gray dotard lacking an heir, in order to provide for your impoverished family.”

A flush of indignant rage burned even upon the very temples of Lady Willersdale, at the gross and startling accusation. “This is too much,” she exclaimed; “not even your violence shall detain me here to be thus outraged.”

Colonel Seymour flung his arms upon the marble balustrade, and concealing his face, appeared overwhelmed by his feelings. “It is not my *violence* that shall retain you by my side,” said he at length, in a softened voice. “If your pity, your womanly mercy, do not induce you to hear and counsel a wretch whose happiness hangs upon your forgiveness—go—

leave me! a last alternative will yet remain."

Lady Willersdale glanced towards the rolling waters of the river, as she listened to the faint and melancholy tones of the desperate Seymour. Women have a wondrous credulity on such occasions!—they know that "men have died for love, and the worms have eaten them," and are always ready to pacify the threadbare threat of self-destruction. Involuntarily, either through the softness of her nature, or the frailty of her sex—involuntarily Helen replaced herself on the bench to listen to the ravings of her lover.

"And now, madam," he resumed, in a voice of the calmest composure, "all is over. At the very moment when I had overcome some portion of my difficulties,—for when I visited Mordaunt Park, I was overwhelmed by all the debts and dangers of an idle and vicious man,—when I had overcome some measure of the numerous obstacles by which my expectations were beset, and had begun to indulge in the dear and

hallowed hope of offering my worthless self, and my fond and passionate devotion to your acceptance,—the fatal truth—the truth which was destined to render my after-life a dreary solitude, burst suddenly upon my knowledge. Sir Stephen Mordaunt had accomplished the sordid views of his narrow policy; Sir Stephen Mordaunt had bartered his young and innocent daughter for the interest of a man in power; he had gained a coronet for Helen, and a commissionership for his son; ay! at the poor expence of his own respectability, and the eternal misery of a wretched contemptible younger brother like myself,—who might hang, or shoot, or drown, as the occasion presented itself.”

“ You accuse my father,” observed Lady Willersdale, resentfully; “ yet, you confess that he was ignorant of—of your attachment.”

“ Oh! no, no! I have made no such confession. I have said that I never expressly sought your hand; but he—your brothers—the whole household, must have been observant of my

despair, my agony, on quitting Mordaunt. They knew my peculiar situation; and should have been more merciful. But I loiter, and you are impatient."

"Be satisfied, you have told me all."

"No, Helen, no! I have not told you with what bitterness of spirit I was compelled to witness your triumphant entrance into society. You appeared in London as its most distinguished bride, and all the world felt towards you, and spoke of you as I had done. Yet among the many voices that hymned your praise, *mine* was unheard; among the numerous admirers who crowded around you, *my* footstep alone approached not. I persuaded myself that you were conscious of your power over me; that you would exult in my mortification; that you would perhaps point me out to the ridicule of your little circle; or, worse than all, perhaps to that of Willersdale himself! But this reserve, this self-command, could not, and did not, long prevail. I beheld you launched into the world,

and unwatched by the jealous vigilance which I had believed must necessarily surround a treasure such as Helen ; I saw you even in your earliest marriage-hours, abandoned to your own listless self-governance, or to the evil prompting of Lady Danvers. I observed—forgive me—that there existed not between Lord Willersdale and yourself, that intimate confidence of affection which I had believed his assiduities would win from your youthful and inexperienced heart. The world, with its motley masque of the gay and the great captivated your eye; and things, and places, and people, which have long ceased to interest minds so *blasé* as my own, wore, in your estimation, the attractive gloss of novelty. I trembled, Helen !—no longer for myself, but for *you* ! Barton, with all his glozing hypocrisy, was constantly at your side ; Melbourne, with his finical adulation ; Wilmington, with his ardent and chivalrous devotion. I could not bear to see your ear engrossed by their common-place flatteries ; I

could not bear to see them seeking, with the mere ordinary views of a London trifler, to create an interest, to win a regard, which *I* would have perilled earth and heaven to make my own."

Touched by the earnestness of her companion, Lady Willersdale sighed deeply.

"Again I approached you, Helen!—unconsciously, involuntarily—and your gracious reception more than encouraged my frequent return to your society. Lady Danvers—for what bad purpose she best can tell—constantly invited me to break in upon your tête à tête;—morning, evening,—in the ball-room, the ride or the promenade,—she contrived to make me your companion. And oh! why did I cherish a privilege so dangerous!—why have I drained to intoxication—to madness—the cup thus invitingly proffered to my lips! I have seen you, and heard you every hour of the last two months; I know every lovely smile on your countenance, and every noble thought of your

innocent mind. And to what can all this tend, but to increase my misery—to aggravate my remorse—to blacken the bright worldly prospects which are beginning to unfold before me!”

Again Lady Willersdale sighed, and with the deepest compassion.

“Could I but permit myself to cherish the expectations, slight as they were, which I entertained last week!—Intimately connected with the Danvers’s, with your own family, and honoured with the friendship of Lord Willersdale, I had hoped this long dreary autumn and winter would be cheered by occasional admittance into your domestic circle; and that I might be at least permitted to gaze in hopeless worship upon your face—as the Persian bends in adoration before some unapproachable star. But even this poor consolation is denied me.”

“And wherefore?” inquired Lady Willersdale, “has any misunderstanding occurred between yourself and your friends? Has Lord Willersdale expressed——”

“Dearest Helen!” interrupted Seymour, enchanted by this confession of interest, “I have long admired your utter indifference and wilful ignorance of the political intrigues passing around you. I adore the simplicity of character which raises you above all this vulgar gossip of the feuds of kings and their ministers,—all this paltry *tracasserie* of the cabinet. But *I* have learned to regard it in a different view;—and although it would scarcely move a sigh or a smile of mine were all the potentates of Europe to hang their premiers and their secretaries as high as Haman, I own myself profoundly interested in the present change of administration—for it involves our friendship—Helen! our prospects of meeting;—and with them my every hope of future joy or comfort.—”

Lady Willersdale made a movement expressive of impatience.

“Listen to me for another moment—and I will release you from your thralldom. I have already informed you of my dependent situa-

tion; and that my future fortunes hang upon the caprice of Lady Gertrude Wentworth. She uses her power, as women *will* use their power,—somewhat ungenerously; and however conscious of my inactivity of mind and body, my utter aversion to business of any kind, she has made my acceptance of an office of some importance in her nephew's patchwork ministry, the *sine qua non* of her future favour! She is pleased to talk of the value of my abilities, united with the trustworthiness of kindred, to my cousin; and the duke himself has already written me a ream of persuasions on the subject."

"And you will surely accept an appointment at once honourable and advantageous. You have long expressed a desire to leave the guards;—can you find a more satisfactory opportunity?"

"There is a contingency annexed to this event, which neutralizes all its advantages. Every important change in the British ministry

is followed by an outbreak of private pique, and public vituperation. The present, which is connected with circumstances of peculiar interest will, in all probability, prove the source of ill-blood, and evil-will, and personality on both sides. Do not imagine that I believe Lord Willersdale incapable of retiring with dignity; no! I acknowledge him to be ‘the noblest Roman of them all;’—but it is the herd of jackals who follow for their prey—it is the Brills, and the Harbertons who find it their interest to place an impassable gulph of enmity between their patrons. It is the ‘dirty dog’s dirty dog’s dirty dog,’ who howls us out of all Christian patience, when his long-mumbled bone is taken from between his teeth.”

“But what have creatures such as these in common with your prospects?”

“Simply this. A banner of rivalry will be unfurled by the Duke of Delville as well as Lord Willersdale; and by enrolling myself permanently and ostensibly among the partizans

of the former, I acknowledge myself an enemy to the latter."

"No one can be less influenced by political principles in his private friendships than Lord Willersdale."

"You have known him only under the softening operation of prosperity;—success inspires a generous mind with forbearance and indulgence. You will behold him soon smarting under the ungrateful injuries of public desertion; and then, believe me, no member of a Delville administration will find favour in his sight. This very night Lady Gertrude will convey to the duke my refusal or acceptance of his patronage. My elder brother from family pride, my younger ones from family poverty, are eager that I should put on the livery of the state. But it is *you* alone—it is one single word, one single look of yours, that will decide my irresolution."

"As Lord Willersdale's wife I am of course unwilling to assist in swelling the number of his adversaries."

“No—no! it is not as Willersdale’s wife that you must regard the question. No! no! you must divest yourself of that influence, or my destiny is prejudged indeed! Be your determination urged by mercy—by your recognition of my unqualified devotion to your will. Tell me only that you will look upon me with endurance—with compassion—that you will receive me with the same courteous kindness you have ever done, and I will sooner forfeit my life than so dear a privilege! Answer me, my most beloved Helen!—accept the life which I devote to your friendship—accept the dominion of mind, and heart, and hand, which I lay at your feet, and my fate is decided. Remember that I ask not, nor will *ever* ask, one dangerous concession; that I claim no act of favour humiliating or painful to your feelings; say but, ‘Ferdinand Seymour—I do not hate you!’ and not the prayers of my family, or the whole nation—not the decree of Parliament, or the command of the king—should compel my

compliance with the Duke of Delvile's proposal."

Lady Willersdale, perplexed and harassed by his persevering pertinacity, was still undecided in what terms to soften the expression of her dissatisfaction, when hurrying steps were heard on every side, and from various exclamations that reached her ear, she could ascertain that Lady Danvers's servants had been sent in search of her. With feelings of deep regret that she had permitted herself to be deluded to so lone and suspicious a spot, she hastened forwards to reply to the summons; and when, accompanied by Colonel Seymour, she emerged from the shade, her annoyance was deeply aggravated by finding the mournful gaze of Lord Barton, and the contemptuous sneer of Mr. Brill, fixed upon her movements!

CHAPTER X.

Think'st thou there are no serpents in the world
But those who slide along the glassy sod,
And sting the luckless foot that presses them
There are, who in the path of social life
Do bask their spotted skins in fortune's sun,
And sting the soul—ay, 'till its healthful frame
Is changed to secret, festering, sore disease.

Joanna Baillie.

VEXED and disconcerted by this discovery, the agitated Helen could scarcely persuade herself to retain the arm of Colonel Seymour as she followed her conductors into the presence of Lady Danvers; whom she found reposing herself in one of the exquisite morning-rooms of the villa, receiving the last compliments of some of the latest lingerers among her guests.

“ Is it so late ? ” inquired Lady Willersdale ;
“ I thought you were to have had an *entrée de ballet* after the *vaudeville* . ”

“ *Ballet* and *vaudeville* have done their best and their longest for us, my dear Helen ; but they could not last for ever . ”

“ And the fireworks ? ”

“ Nay, if you have neither seen nor heard our *bouquets* of rockets, you must have been dozing with the seven sleepers . ”

“ Does Lady Willersdale *talk* in her sleep, Colonel Seymour ? ” inquired Mr. Brill, officiously.

“ I should imagine, Sir, that you can have no possible interest in the question , ” replied Seymour, with a look of defiance which effectually silenced his ill-bred interlocutor.

“ You will forgive my disturbing you , ” said Lady Danvers, languidly ; “ I assure you I deferred my interference till the last moment, notwithstanding Lord Barton’s anxiety that I should cause the river to be dragged for your

recovery, and Mr. Brill's insinuations that you had been *croquée* by some wicked wolf in one of the shrubberies. People seldom drown in pairs; and I knew that Seymour was with you. But my dear Lady Willersdale, do not let me keep you standing during this tedious explanation—a *gaucherie* always to be avoided, either in a comedy, or in the graver farce of human life. I sent to you to beg your charity in my own favour; will you take me back to town to-night?"—

"With pleasure, if you desire it; but you appear tired. Surely—"

"Nay! if I disarrange any of your plans, pray refuse me *sans façon*."

"I shall only be too happy to avoid a solitary drive."

"Then are we *d'accord*. To say the truth, I do not care to be left here to the mercy of all the blue devils which haunt the *débris* of a *fête*. The ghost of pleasure is a fearful phantom."

Lady Danvers literally shuddered as she

spoke; and Helen observed that the long dark tresses which hung around her face, uncurled by the evening damps, gave to its accustomed fairness, a pallid lustre almost preternatural. She exerted herself, however, to make her adieus to her remaining guests with her usual graceful vivacity; and even for some minutes after they had entered the carriage which was to convey them to town, Honoria affected a tone of animation that suited but ill with her exhausted air and hoarse voice. At length she sank back apparently wearied by her efforts; and Lady Willersdale was too deeply absorbed in her own bewildering reflections, to interrupt the contemplation of her sister-in-law.

It was one of those glorious nights in July, when the firmament, gemmed by a thousand scattered stars, with a single planet quivering in bright intensity, seems to blend itself into a still more intimate union with the earth;—that medium of languid joy,—an atmosphere laden with the sweets of summer, and mild and tranquil as the sleep of innocence—connects them into one beau-

tiful creation of peace and love. In such an hour the hidden impulses of the soul bestir themselves with irrepressible energy. The past comes back to us with its visions, its dawning affections, its confiding hopes; the future reveals its shadowy shewing in the vague lustre of an auspicious dream. And the thoughts which shape themselves within our depths of mind, and the feelings which gush unchecked in the secrecy of our hearts, ought surely to be tinged with the purity and sanctity of the hour. The breath of Heaven is upon us!—the sabbath of the universe is solemnized around in the stillness of nature; and human passions and human frailties seem twice-accursed when, like spirits of evil, they stalk abroad amidst a scene so holy!

The road traversed by the brilliant equipage of Lady Willersdale, lay between a succession of gardens such as surround the suburbs of London; the fragrance of myriads of roses was upon the air; and as the two sisters reclined themselves in luxurious indolence, it might be

supposed that their mutual silence arose from the exclusive intensity of their enjoyment of the passing hour. Both were young—both were beautiful—both nobly wedded—both elevated immeasurably above the vulgar anxieties of life. The happiness of both might be supposed assured; and prosperity, whose prodigal favour had flung such golden gifts upon their path, had also enriched them with the power of conferring happiness, and of scattering flowers upon the thorny destiny of others. Yet hear it, thou sickly mechanic! whose struggling breath labours with the noisome atmosphere of thy squalid home;—hear it, thou midnight wanderer! who dost shelter thy ragged misery in some den of perilous infamy;—hear it, thou meagre woman! who wouldst vainly still the feeble cries of thy famished children; hear it, and acknowledge the equal dispensation of that hand whose chastening is of mercy!—Beneath the gorgeous robing of those beautiful and prosperous beings, there were hearts agonized by

terror and remorse ;—the tears upon their cheeks were bitter tears ;—they saw no promise of peace in the sacred calm of the summer sky ; they confessed no heavenly presence in the glorious harmony of universal nature !

Not a single word had passed between them from the moment they left the shrubberies of Burwood, till they passed the long avenue of chesnuts to which Mrs. Beaumont had alluded.

“ Rosemount, is it not ?” said Helen, with indifference ; looking from the open window towards a mansion from whose windows the lights of festivity were still glancing.

“ Rosemount,” replied Lady Danvers, in an affirmative tone, and again she relapsed into silence ; but in a few minutes a sort of suppressed groan which broke from her lips, confirmed Lady Willersdale in the suspicion that she was weeping.

“ My dear Honoria !” she exclaimed, leaning towards her, and affectionately taking her hand.

“ Go !” replied Lady Danvers, in a concen-

trated voice, as she repulsed her caresses, “go ! —be base, be hypocritical, be time-serving, like the rest ; fill up the picture of human ingratitude ; bless me with the assurance of the vileness of my species ; that I may be deluded into no further trust in man or woman. Let me hate *you*, Helen ! even as I detest myself, and all my race.”

A bitter laugh terminated this frantic rhapsody, and Lady Willersdale became suddenly apprehensive that her companion had been seized with a paroxysm of insanity. Involuntarily she shrank from her into a corner of the carriage.

“You are afraid of me !” exclaimed Lady Danvers with a still more hollow and contemptuous laugh. “Good ! you tremble to find yourself unprotected by my side ; *you* whose dauntless courage can trust yourself for hours in solitude with Ferdinand Seymour !—Good ! you are either a fool or a hypocrite, Helen ; and I admire you accordingly.”

Lady Willersdale's apprehensions became still more confirmed by this uncourteous violence. She was too much startled even to remonstrate.

"You have nothing to fear from me now—nothing!" continued Lady Danvers in a more measured voice. "There was a time when you were an object of enmity to me—of disgust; but it did not last long; and I have liked you since as much as I am capable of liking any thing. Nay, at this moment, Helen, when I am stung into abhorrence of the whole human kind, I look upon *you* with no harsher feeling than pity. You have nothing to fear from me."

"Pity!" ejaculated Helen; still more and more astonished.

"The most contemptuous compassion! I see you treading upon a path whose specious surface scarcely conceals the filthy materials of which it is composed; I see you calmly pursuing an object which will soon revolt its possessor

by its loathsome properties ; I see you befooled by all the deceptions that have successively deluded myself ; and God knows I pity you !—for like me you will be undeceived. Ay ! *you*, you yourself, will one day be agonized and humiliated, as I am now.”

“ What horrible occurrence can have agitated you thus,” exclaimed Lady Willersdale.

“ Occurrence !—none whatever, my dear primitive sister. Catastrophes are for novels and tragedies ; but the crisis of real life springs from the gradual filling of the cup of bitterness—from the daily mortifications—the hourly slights—the disappointments we experience from others—from ourselves. At this very moment my worst pang arises from the consciousness of my lost courage, from the failure of my self-support. I had thought—I had flattered myself—that I could guard my anguish from the prying insolence of the crowd ; and lo ! I am self-convicted of the weakness and folly of a peevish girl.”

Again she wept, and again Lady Willersdale's gentle nature prompted her to soothe an affliction altogether incomprehensible.

“How little do you know me!” resumed Lady Danvers, rousing herself by a prodigious effort. “How little do the most discriminating among us *really* know of the beings with whom they walk side by side—hand in hand through life! The actor is screened by his hypocrisy—the spectator is blinded by his egotism;—both are to blame! Yet were our natures examined through the uncompromising lens of truth, what would become of our trust in human virtue; where should we fix the confidence of our friendships—to whom intrust the treasure of our affections? Such as *I* am, such are one half the honourable and the honoured, who form the crowd of our society; and a glorious congregation we should make for ‘*Le Palais de la vérité*.’ Yes, Helen; we are all alike! In the contaminating atmosphere wherein we have our being,

“ On commence par être dupe—on finit par être fripon.”

“ Thank heaven, I have no objection that the knaves should call *me* fool,” replied Lady Wiltersdale. “ Long may I be classed in so estimable a minority.”

“ You are thankfu’ for sma’ mercies, as the Scottish phrase runs,” replied her companion, gradually rallying herself from her dejection : “ To my thinking, however, ’tis better to run the path of honesty wittingly, than blindfolded. But in *my* destiny that path has never manifested its narrow opening ; I might have sought it,—but I was born with the mental and moral indolence of a Turk. Judge for yourself whether occasions of improvement have presented themselves.

“ My father, Helen, was *a gold stick* ! I speak it not ironically, although the fact might justify my filial impiety. My mother was a lady in waiting. They were fairly matched ; for both seemed formed only to kiss hands ;—a perpetual bow appeared to incline the paternal vertebræ, and an eternal curtsey to bow the

loyal knees of my gracious lady-mother. Their very virtues savoured of Windsor; Lady Willersdale nursed her own sickly children in emulation of Queen Charlotte; and his lordship devoured his tough roast mutton at three o'clock, after the example of his unsophisticated sovereign. I remember my youthful reverence for that most graceful union of blue and scarlet broadcloth, which liveried the household gods of my parent's idolatry, and which would dishonour their footmen; the Windsor uniform appeared to me the wedding garment of the heavenly banquet! My philological initiation was equally peculiar. One word—and that of no very striking grandiloquence—one universal noun governed all the verbs of the Willersdale lexicon—*influence*! Riches and rank became subordinate distinctions; for he who had *influence* might dispense with, or command both. *Influence* could bleach the stains of sin—could throw its brocade over the russet gown of obscurity—could supply wit and wis-

dom to the dull—reputation to the depraved ; could atone for the wreck of health—the waste of existence—the forfeiture of heaven ! Vainly did patriotism, and generosity, and piety, and the quadruple cardinalate ride forward on their ‘high trotting horses ;’ a man once seated in the saddle of *influence* might defy them on their own course.—Such were the tenets of my parents—such the creed of their daughter !

“I know not how my brother’s mind overflowed the narrow mould in which it was his father’s will to form it. Perhaps it was during his courtly scholarship at Eton, or his tory studies at Oxford, that its eagle energies escaped their golden cage ; for even in his early youth, he afforded no hope of that subservience of character which

To party gives up what was meant for mankind.

“ My father, with his gold stick quaking in his hands, sent him to study his humanities at Brunswick or Göttingen ; hoping, perhaps, to

stultify his youthful enthusiasm with German beer and German metaphysics. Besides, it was necessary for his courtiership that he should learn to eat raw Westphalian ham ! Do I bore you, Helen, with these annals of the House of Willersdale ? for we have brought ourselves to a turnpike and a full stop."

"Pray, pray proceed," replied Lady Willersdale, eagerly ; and rejoicing to find the vehemence of her companion gradually subside into a more tranquil tone.

"My brother thus Guelphically exiled, it became my turn to interest the speculations of my parents. The birth-night arrived which was to inaugurate me into the real business of life ; and my mother's point lappets literally vibrated with emotion. Fortunately my minuet was triumphant ; and the good nature of a royal compliment stamped me current as a beauty ; her Majesty graciously pronounced me to be the exact image of some consanguineous highness of Mecklenburg. Heaven forbid, that

the family portraits of that illustrious dynasty extant at Windsor castle, should serve to avouch the fact! A few days afterwards, a *fête* at Frogmore somewhat amended my conceptions of the joys of courtiership. The stately minuet gave place to lighter movements; and a single smile from the Prince, who was then in the full glory of his graceful youth, dispersed from my mind all its prejudices touching the formality of royalty. A smile from the prince!—the word *influence* already assumed a more powerful meaning in my ears.

“Before the close of the season, a certain fat foolish Lord Danvers was presented to me by my father for my acceptance. I inquired concerning his temper; I was told of his boroughs. I was curious respecting his principles; a yard of rent roll was unfolded to my scrutiny. I asked his character in the world; and my mother pointed in the peerage to the date of his creation. One only question remained. Was he a man of any influence? ‘My dear Ho-

noris,' replied my father, stretching the ruffle of his shirt by his utmost dignity of elevation, 'do you suppose that I should otherwise have afforded his lordship's proposals one moment's consideration?'

"From that day nothing was talked of in the house but white and silver laces; and blue and gold tissue; the archbishop who was to perform the ceremony; and the royal bridesmaids who were to honour our nuptials. All the newspapers of the day recorded the happiness of a bride to whom her Majesty had graciously presented a Dresden tea-pot as a wedding present; but no one commemorated the good advice by which the gift was accompanied;—yet that royal exhortation was the first word of Christian, or womanly counsel that had ever reached my ears. As the matron homily of the Queen is rather too long for recital, I shall only record the parting benedictions of my parents. 'God bless you, Lady Danvers,' said my mother, wiping her eyes. 'Remember that if you wish to at-

tain any *influence* over your husband, gluttony is his little *foiblesse*. I present you with these volumes,—the ‘*Cuisinier bourgeois*,’ and the ‘*Cuisinier Impérial*.’ Make them the manual of your studies, and you will acquire unlimited power over the *mind* of Lord Danvers. The weakness of a husband forms the strong hold of the wife.’

“ ‘I wish your ladyship may live to enjoy all the blessings of this life,’ said my father, profoundly touched by the emblazonments of my travelling carriage. ‘But remember, Honoria, that if you wish to retain your *influence* in society, you must not contract your views and waste your time upon the littlenesses of domestic life. The mind, (says a distinguished philosopher,) which applies itself to trifles, becomes incapable of extending its views to objects of importance. Farewell, my dear child; your teapot will be safe in Lady Willersdale’s cabinet till your return.’

“Heaven forgive me, for remembering all

this trash," continued Lady Danvers, after receiving the tribute of a faint laugh from her companion. "Yet trash as it was, it *influenced* my destiny. By the '*Cuisinier Impérial*' I learned to govern my *gourmand* of a husband and, by my father's hollow axioms, I have governed—*myself*. Through life I have sedulously

Revered the devil for his burning throne."

"But surely," inquired Lady Willersdale, shocked by the levity of her companion, "surely you indulged in some little *prestige* of affection for Lord Danvers at the period of your marriage?"

"Yet should some neighbour feel a pain
Just in the part where I complain,"

cried Lady Danvers, laughing as she spoke; "Ah! you wish to ascertain how far our matrimonial destinies may have been parallel.—I trust, but in a small degree; for although I have always been persuaded that you married my brother under parental influence, and with-

out affection—nay ! do not interrupt me—yet I fancy *fear* was the worst passion that you cherished against your husband ; while I regarded mine with—*contempt*. Nay, worse—yet I must tell it or teach you nothing, I already loved another !”

“ And Lord and Lady Willersdale were aware of your attachment ? ”

“ To what purpose could I have disclosed it ?—The object of my affections had not a shadow of *influence* ; was poor, plebeian ; and my mother would have considered the word *love* from my lips as a gross outrage of decency. In those Frogmore days, young ladies were not permitted to know that they *had* hearts. Mine was not unworthily bestowed, if an honourable character, and sense, and conduct, are claims to distinction. I have bestowed it since—and more than once—with far less excuse.”

“ More than——”

“ The death of my parents,” continued Lady Danvers, without noticing the interruption, “ recalled Willersdale to his native country.

He found me rich in the favour of the world— young, and lovely, and holding a high *influence* in society. He remembered me as the companion of his childhood, and as the only member of his own family who had not striven to document him into courtiership—and he loved me for each and all of these qualities and qualifications. It happened, that a series of continental dissipation had at that period thrown a degree of temporary embarrassment into Danvers's affairs. His *bon-vivant* habits rendered him a sorry auditor of accounts ; and I, who affected to take that office into my own hands, was already incapacitated for the task, by engagements of a very different nature. My brother advised our passing a year or two on our Irish estates ; and my sapient Lord, who had a fancy to taste *filets de saumon* fresh out of the Liffey, made no material objection. For my own part, as the Lady-Lieutenant chanced to be my *amie de cœur*, and as the vice regal court happened to be framed according to my especial predilections,

I devoted myself to this conjugal duty with a tolerable grace. My *influence* at the Castle was unbounded; and my two years of Irish exile afford some of the most agreeable reminiscences of my life.

“ Our return to England had a twofold origin of singular coincidence. The same political change which determined the recall of my friend the Viceroy, elevated Willersdale into place and power; and our Hibernian economies fortunately enabled me to re-open Danvers House in a manner calculated to do honour to our connexion. What I have since become you know. The *haut ton* of London, if led with an undaunted hand, is one of the most docile brutes in nature—I made it follow me and eat out of my hand like a pet spaniel; but while I gloried in the art by which I continued to render it so tame, I overlooked the degrading fact, that the morsels in my hand were its attraction:—that hand is empty now, Helen, and you have seen me to-day deserted by my base parasite.”

“ Surely, you do not attribute the accidental absence of a portion of your guests to Lord Willersdale’s removal from the ministry ?”

“ To what other cause ?—Would any one among their number have followed last week in the wake of that transcendental idiot the Duchess of Delvile ?—Melbourne who has been my sycophant, my creature, my minion ;—Wilmington, who has been more, much more ;—Herberton who is indebted for the bread he eats to my brother’s protection !—all gone—all !—leaving me such followers as the odious Brill—who has not courage to be among the front ranks of the deserters !”

“ But, my dearest Lady Danvers, in your position in the world—with a husband, children, rank, and fortune to interest your feelings—how can you possibly affix such undue importance to the defection of half a dozen idle, worthless men, and the defiance of as many malicious women.”

“ Helen, you know nothing of the ordination

of society. That paltry knot of human beings whom you rightly designate with scorn, forms the priesthood whose arts dispense the false oracles of fashion. From them originates the sneer, the lie, the bitter jest, whence all the voices in London borrow their applause or condemnation. You, with your provincial notions of independence, have not the slightest conception from how very contracted a source emanate the mighty springs of public opinion. Society is formed of parrots, who ‘worship the echo.’ A single phrase from its high authorities, furnishes the million and one variations which form the conversation of the day. To-morrow, all London—to the extreme verge of St. Pancras—will be lamenting and philosophizing over ‘poor Lady Danvers’s’ empty rooms, and superfluous preparations. *Poor Lady Danvers!*”

“And can you be moved by such impertinence.”

“Why should you doubt it!”

“Because I am persuaded that your present

distress of mind arises from some latent and more honourable cause.”

Lady Danvers covered her face with her handkerchief, but made no reply ; a silence of many minutes ensued between the parties. Already they had reached the illuminated entrance of Piccadilly, and were surrounded by the hum and the stir of the metropolis, which strike so unwelcomely on the senses during the summer heats, after the refreshment of the turf, and the trees, and the stillness of the country.

As they turned into Grosvenor Square, Lady Danvers hastily adjusted her disordered hair, and prepared herself to meet the scrutiny of her domestics.

“Helen !” said she, as she stretched out her hand at parting, to her sister, “could you but imagine—dare I but tell you—the bitterness, the remorse, the deep, deep misery which are at this moment struggling in my heart—you would need no better warning against the temptations with which myself and the world have already

enviored your path. I had not thought to make you the spectator of my humiliation of spirit:—but remember it, Helen!—remember when the fascinations of society are pressing around you—whenever you are tempted by extravagance, or intoxicated by dissipation—remember on how dreary a strand you will be left by the ebbing of the tide. My sleepless pillow of this night should be worth a thousand homilies. *A demain*—and rest better than I shall!”

Dispirited and harassed by all she had seen and heard, Helen re-entered the home she had left that morning in so different a mood. She was met at the foot of the stairs by the bland and smiling Vernon.

“ My Lord bid me inform your Ladyship, that he had dined at home in hopes of finding you; that he is gone down to Richmond for change of air, and will return by to-morrow night.”

Disappointed of the explanation she had hoped to receive from her husband, Helen pro-

ceeded to her own apartment to derive such consolation as she might from Lady Mordaunt's letter, which she found lying on her dressing table ; when, having dismissed her maid, she threw herself into a *fauteuil* ; and the reminiscences of the eventful day soon absorbed her every thought and every feeling.

CHAPTER X.

I dare him therefore
 To lay his gay companions hip apart,
 And answer me declined, sword against sword,
 Ourselves alone.—I'll write it !—follow me.

Antony and Cleopatra.

THE predictions of the sapient Mr. Brill—who, like many other despicable human compounds of folly and knavery, was no mean adept in that characteristic science called knowledge of the world—concerning the recoil of public opinion, were more than verified in the instance of Lord Willersdale. Throughout the archives of the British government, throughout the petty records of political intrigue, it is probable that no name could be found inscribed by history more

purely free from the taint of public or private vice. Upright and honourable as became his exalted station—wise, and good, and generous as would have elevated into distinction a less noble destiny, he had been hitherto fortunate in winning and retaining a due estimation in the regard of the public; which hailed him as one of the most diligent and most disinterested among its servants. But the moment that his ascendant star was seen to fade, the tide of vulgar favour which it had served to influence, ebbed back to the deep; and in the sandy waste which it deserted, Mockery,—with its long lean finger,—delighted to trace the characters of his name, coupled with every ignominious epithet that malice could suggest.

The immediate origin of Lord Willersdale's secession from the ministry was a question of great popular interest—it matters not whether “Catholics or corn”—on which, finding himself unable to coincide with the conciliatory views of Government, he had simply, and almost singly

withdrawn himself from an administration whose change of political principle he conceived to be fatal to the interests of the Constitution. He had been the first to direct the clamours of the opposition against a measure which he regarded as inimical to the welfare of their common country; and like other innovators on public prejudice, he had the satisfaction of being received with mistrust on one side, and of being followed by the contemptuous sneers of that which he had abandoned. Every improbable or impossible charge that the grossest slander could invent was publicly affixed to his character; the columns of the public prints were redeemed from their ordinary tone of inane insipidity by the most verbose explosions of righteous indignation against the man who dared hold out in unyielding opposition to “a concession demanded by the urgent necessities of a starving people;” and the gentlemen of the press—(we hear of professional men—ministerial men—military men—but “the *gentlemen of the*

press")— were profuse of those powerful and expressive epithets, which are kept in stereotype, for the advantage of dissolved ministries and disgraced courtiers. Had Lady Willersdale by chance directed her attention from the announcements of "Almack's grand ball;" or, "the expected fête at Burwood," to some of the antecedent paragraphs of the morning papers, she might have seen the name she bore characterized by every dishonouring qualification that could render it loathsome to the public eye.

Fortunately for herself, her fair forehead was singularly deficient in the very general organ of *eventuality* which, we are assured by the phrenological authorities, induces its victim to have recourse to fair means and foul, for the earliest possession of the Morning Post. Vernon, that most polite of functionaries, was assiduous in guarding from her observation every leaf and every line capable of giving offence or mortification to his lady; and if Lord Willers-

dale was fortunate in finding beneath his hand at Bellamy's or his club, the *catalogues raisonnés* of his crimes and misdemeanours, domestic or official, which were invariably hurried in Hamilton Place into the stove of the steward's room, he regarded them with the calm contempt that every public man entertains towards what are termed the organs of public opinion. His forbearing spirit would have been as easily roused against a dog howling beside his gates, as against the cut-and-dried abuse of the hirelings of faction.

But by a most disastrous coincidence his forbearance was destined to an ordeal of a very different nature. A country member—"my honourable friend the member for Gotham"—who was in the habit of borrowing his arguments and polishing his periods in the labyrinths of great letter grandiloquence, was destined to unite his burning consciousness of the wrongs intended by Lord Willersdale's line of policy towards the peculiar interests of his peculiar

city of Gotham, with the still more inflammatory effervescence of a bottle of club claret, whose fiery decoction he had swallowed simultaneously with some of the coarsest among the vituperative paragraphs in question. Conscious, perhaps, of some difficulty in maintaining, that evening, his equilibrium upon his legs, the honourable member seized on an early opportunity for the experiment ; and in the course of a luminous speech, involving all possible varieties of logical and grammatical confusion, he contrived to string together every opprobrious epithet, and every offensive anecdote which was floating through his chaotic brain, in relation to the ex-minister. Compelled into the decency of silence by the universal indignation of the House, the worthy Gothamite appeared resolved to respect its compulsory edict when required to apologize at leisure for the errors of his haste. Even Solomon is confessed to have been abusive under a similar excitement ; but the member who had been condemned as “ out of order,” would by

no means submit to acknowledge himself “ out of humour.” Men are always to be found whose pugnacious propensities incline them to chafe the irritations of every passing quarrel; the Gothamite was readily backed in his obstinacy by those who found means to stimulate his half-drunken valour; and thus a well-intentioned, good-humoured, country squire, was converted by the wanton folly of his neighbours, into the assassin of one of the first and most virtuous men of his time. The opinion of the world decided it necessary that they should exchange shots.

It is rare for a considerable period to elapse in the political history of England without the occurrence of an official duel; and on such occasions a regular routine of inconclusive argument is bestowed on the patient ear of the public. No sooner have the requisite portion of bullets been exchanged, a thorax more or less perforated, or hands mutually shaken, as the occasion and the seconds may justify—no

sooner has the affair been driven by judicious enemies and injudicious friends to the crisis which private interference *might*, and public interference *ought* to have intercepted, than the whole world grows vociferous touching the folly or the wickedness of the innocent combatants,—who are often passive agents in the whole affair. The official antagonist is authoritatively required to remember the duty he owes to the public. In virtue of his quarterly salary he is debarred from the supererogative independence of living his own life, and dying his own death. He is reminded that he is in fact a “man of two lives;”—a bifold martyr, who must learn to distinguish between ministerial moderation and individual susceptibility. In his public capacity he must endure to hear himself opprobriated as knave or fool, inasmuch as he has bound himself for hire to the rack of public opinion; but in his individual littleness it becomes equally his duty to shoot any wanton offender who may maliciously tread

on the tail of his favourite poodle. No gentleman has a right to be angry in his own time and place; his hereditary escutcheon renders his quarrels the property of the public. Still less a minister! who is "its goods—its chattels—its ox—its ass—its every thing."

Meanwhile it is not to be supposed that either the writers, or the readers, or the objects of these plausible exhortations, deceive themselves for a single moment as to the necessity of the abuse they reprobate. All are equally assured that the minister, whether in the peace or war department, who testifies his respect to the public and to Windsor Castle by tenderness for his own valuable life at the economy of a duel, must run the gauntlet of all ranks and degrees of insult,—from the caricature-shop to the biting jests of some gibing brother on the Treasury bench, who has been long looking out for a pair of uninhabited shoes. They know too that it requires nothing less than the courage of Achilles to evade a challenge; a

prudential measure which subjects its perpetrator *for life* to the chance of a duel a-day ;—it is only a public mode of begging to be horse-whipped !

It is rather singular that of the few half-obsolete usances we derive from the olden time, there is not *one* which has not suffered deterioration in our hands ; a proof perhaps that customs, like plants, will only flourish in their own soil and season. In the days of chivalry,—before Courts of Pleas, common or uncommon, were established to affix a proportionate mulct on all breaches of social law,—before our characters could be legally valued and remunerated at so much per ounce, and our injuries redressed by the operation of the rule of three—

The rush together in the bright-eyed lists might be a very satisfactory way of adjusting a personal feud. Half a nation assembled in the tilting ground, afforded the combatants another mode of being judged by their peers ;

while the pious adjuration of the heralds that “God would defend the right,” was discreetly seconded on both sides by a substantial suit of Venetian armour, or a steel shirt of *Almaine rivet*.

There is but one step, we are told, from the sublime to the ridiculous; and this slight barrier would appear to have been overpassed in the transition between the single combat of chivalry, and the *duel* of modern valour; were it not so frequently connected with tragic catastrophes, its farce would be only too convincingly apparent. Some wretched man who has placed his hat upon a wrong seat at a public theatre, and who is probably irritated by the indigestion of a hasty dinner, and by the dulness of the performance which has hurried him during the operation, becomes testy in defence of his beaver; and is required to vindicate his vehemence on the morrow morning at Wormwood Scrubbs, by a gentleman in a braided coat and false shirt collar, whose cognizance, as Captain O’Toole,

was till that disastrous hour wholly unknown to him. Of however many "small children" he may chance to be the father, he must go and be shot at!

Or two gentlemen, having estates in a remote county which they have never visited, become involved in the quarrels of their respective gamekeepers. They commence a correspondence with the freezing monosyllable of "Sir;" and, ending it in a tone many degrees above fever heat, are compelled to defend the rights of their injured pheasants in Battersea Fields; where they look on each others sallow faces for the first time. The challenge is to be kept a profound secret; yet it is generally known to half their male acquaintance, who acquiesce in the absolute necessity of the meeting; while a busy mystery is kept up among the knot of those more immediate and more officious friends, who provide the pistols and the surgeon.

In the mean time, *one* at least of the principals is generally unskilled in the use of the patrician weapon that is placed in his hand. To

take a deliberate aim at the enemy you have risen at early dawn to shoot, would be wilful murder; to fire in the air a tacit confession of being in the wrong, or sometimes a sort of begging the question against a second fire. The ticklish code of honour which regulates the law of duel is the most arbitrary on earth; to violate its merest bye-law is to become a ruffian, —to be ignorant of its most cobweb distinction, is to be the unmentionable antithesis of a gentleman. Yet eye hath not seen, nor ear heard its written or traditional institutes. Rules which are expected to be familiar to the mind of every honourable man are probably discussed in his hearing for the first time, at the agitating moment when he believes himself to have taken a last farewell of his unsuspecting family. Yet an inch more or less in the elevation of his arm, a syllable more or less in his incoherent communication with his *friend* (!) may render him up to the laws of the realm as an unjustifiable homicide! The moment he

has successfully perpetrated an act sanctioned by the precepts and counsels of every man of the world,—he becomes an abhorrent monster!—reviled by the public and the press, and hunted from jury to judge, with the fear of a gibbet before his eyes.

But should a more peaceful termination crown the affair, the parties have the satisfaction of knowing that their mutual escape is instantly hailed by the jocose commentations of society. Some among their acquaintance doubt whether they ever met at all; others conjecture that they may have fought with *bonbons* instead of bullets; and all seem of opinion that so bloodless a quarrel might have been altogether spared. Yet, however false the position of the modern duellist, however terrible his mortal or immortal responsibility, however contemptibly absurd the “manner of the act,”—we know that in the existing order of things, to-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow—will claim its victim! However novelists may

prose,—however Christian preachers may advocate the abolition of duelling—however the authorities of the law fulminate their anathemas against the practise, it must remain

Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
because no *man* can safely or consistently give utterance to his opinions on the subject. And if at some future hour this relic of barbarism should prove to be

Touched and shamed by ridicule alone,
it will be almost worth while to have existed in the female gender, for the privilege of having contributed—without forfeiture of caste—one's mite of condemnation against a usage so barbarous, so contemptible, and so contrary to the spirit of the laws of man—the laws of God !

But to return to Lord Willersdale, whose visit to the gentle rise of Battersea has proved the origin of this tremendously long digression. At the period of his wife and sister's return to town from the disastrous *déjeûner*, he was anxiously engaged at the house of his friend Colonel

Baldwyn in Arlington-street, in a final arrangement of his private and public papers, previous to the meeting on the following morning. To avoid the inquisition of his own servants, he had removed himself in a hackney coach with a cargo of tin cases of every calibre, to the less suspicious retirement of his second's bachelor domicile. It is not however to be supposed, that a circumstance so unprecedented in his domestic economy, could escape the pressing vigilance of the adroit Vernon; who, by dint of listening at keyholes and peeping into envelopes, had already made himself master of every branch of the mystery. But Vernon was a chamberlain of the most supreme ton. He was satisfied that if his lord had in truth been publicly insulted, his lord must also submit to be privately shot at; and he would as soon have thought of laying the affair before parliament as before Bow-street. He felt his dignity to have been somewhat wounded by Lord Willersdale's want of confidence towards him

in this emergency ; but he knew that it would be still further compromised were he to take any independent step towards the interruption of the meeting. If his lordship chanced to escape the sanguinary brace of hair-triggers which were preparing against him, Vernon intended to claim the honours of his coolness and discretion ; and if he fell—why the *dépouille* of a bridegroom's wardrobe would conduce to his consolation. He therefore met Lady Willersdale on her return with his usual mechanical smile ; and slept that night his usual calm untroubled sleep.

Not so, however, the noble hero of the morrow's meeting. Having cheerfully persuaded his assiduous host to retire to rest in order to prepare himself for their untimely movements, Lord Willersdale betook himself to his multitudinous task. Feverish and irritated by the various discussions that had arisen in the course of the evening, in which the heartless selfishness of more than one among

his friends had rendered itself painfully apparent, he threw open the window of his chamber to enjoy the freshness of the summer night ; which was sweetened by the adjoining gardens of the Green-park, and by a stirring western wind. He looked across its wide expanse of turf, towards the illuminated and animated line of Piccadilly—towards the purlieus of a home which perhaps he had quitted for ever ; and his heart rested upon that home and upon its inmates, with a yearning consciousness such as it had rarely proved before.

It was almost for the first time during the four months of his married life that he had found leisure to contemplate with deliberate consideration the mutual position of himself and his lovely bride. A terrible emergency had now brought him to a pause, as favourable as it was unfavourable to a due balance of his own conduct and of hers ; and he was almost startled by a view of his imprudence, and the oversights by which it had been confirmed. He

had ever, even to himself, affected to vindicate his choice of a wife so young, so lovely, so wholly inexperienced in the usages of society, as Helen Mordaunt. He felt that he had made her his—because she *was* his choice;—because he admired her youthful beauty, and adored her youthful candour. But now, he appeared compelled to admit that she was possessed of other qualities which it had been his duty to cultivate, and which he had wholly neglected;—that she had an intelligent mind, whose efforts he had omitted to direct towards those nobler objects which would have materially assisted in the formation of her character;—that she had principles which might have been fostered into excellence, and which he had endangered by the society to which he had too carelessly, too confidently committed her guidance. He acknowledged that he had no right to undertake the responsibility he had chosen;—that he had no right to remove the destiny of a mere child from the protection and care of her parents,

only to cast her upon the wide void of London society, to run her career of folly without restraint. He had been gratified by her success; delighted by the natural elegance of mind which had rendered her superior to the ordinary timidity of a novice. Her ready scholarship in the art of fashion, had seemed to magnify the triumph of his choice; and delicacy and self-love had equally forbidden him to estrange her growing affection by risking to assume the severe tone of a censor.

But was this selfishness excusable? had he not unjustifiably trifled with her better interests? had he not perhaps irremediably assisted in corrupting a mind and heart, which the event of the morrow might leave unguarded to the future seductions of the world?—His Helen, a widow—at eighteen—beautiful and rich, and given up to the contaminating excesses of the fashionable world,—became an object unspeakably painful to his contemplation; and Lord Willersdale shuddered as he remembered how little he had pre-

pared her, by precept, or principle, or even by the axioms of worldly wisdom, for a position of so much peril to herself. But it was idle now to think of this; the time which yet remained his own might be better devoted to the care of her pecuniary interests; and having secured these with unlimited and provident liberality, he proceeded to address her in terms which, in the event of his death, could not fail to interest and impress her susceptible feelings. He confessed to her, and for the first time unreservedly, how fondly she was beloved. He spoke to her without reserve of his anxious fears for her safety—for what now availed the suspicion of jealousy? He spoke to her of her individual responsibility to the tribunal of society—of her still more fearful amenability to the chastisements of God!—for what now availed the charge of severity—of the prudential coldness of age? He wrote with the intimate, the earnest, the tender fervour of one on the brink of an eternal separation; and the tears dropped from his eyes

as he thought on the exquisite endowments of her whom he was about to abandon, and whose affections he had so little attempted to retain exclusively his own.

At length his agonizing task was ended ; and the last duties of his public life, the arrangement of his official documents, became easy and indifferent by comparison. The first gray dawn of summer twilight surprised him at the termination of his task ; surprised him—and with a shock of irremediable urgency ; for his unexpired respite was short indeed for the examination that yet remained—even for the self-communing of a Christian about to encounter the verdict of the mighty Master of his salvation ! To this latest yet most imperative duty, Lord Willersdale addressed himself with the humility and reverential deference characteristic of a powerful and reflecting mind ; and whatever might be the result of his solitary trial—and who shall presume to investigate the perplexities of a crisis so sacred—he left his cham-

ber with an air of such profound composure of mind, that no one might presume to doubt his reliance on the Divine mercy to which he had commended himself.

After a hurried breakfast with his friend Colonel Baldwyn, and the professional gentleman whose services had been secured for the occasion, Lord Willersdale was the first to request that the carriage might be brought round. As they passed the end of Hamilton Place, he threw a rapid glance upon the shuttered windows of his own house. He remembered that in a few short hours they might be permanently closed in token of the violent death of its master; that in a few short hours an eternal separation might divide him from the most beloved among its inmates. Yet no farewell—no parting charge of tenderness—no warning word—no solemn appeal must signalize their separation. He felt that he must leave her to the perils of her destiny—that he had *already* left her; and as the carriage passed onward to Grosvenor Place,—a

road they had often traversed side by side in the chances of their festal career,—Lord Willersdale's heart throbbed so heavily, that it seemed as if all the pulses of his life were concentrated in its solitary action.

CHAPTER XI.

Je me suis en secret interrogé moi même.
 Et mille évènements de mon ame effacés,
 Se sont offerts en foule à mes esprits glacés.
 Le passé m'interdit et le présent m'accable;
 Je lis dans l'avenir un sort épouvantable,
 Et le crime partout semble suivre mes pas.

Œdipe.

IN the mean time, the watches of that eventful night had been passed by Lady Willersdale in a condition of mind and body, scarcely less painful than that whose more profound excitement had distracted the feelings of her husband.

An impediment the most trifling and contemptible has sometimes proved successful in arresting the velocity of a career, to which the

utmost strength of a restraining hand had been applied in vain; and Helen, whose recent course had been one of so much smoothness and rapidity, that she had been unobservant of its track and unconscious of its speed, felt herself dizzied and bewildered by the shock of her sudden pause. In our general condemnation of the conduct or misconduct of persons living within the immediate vortex of society, while we scrupulously weigh their actions and motives, their temptations and principles, we are apt wholly to omit from the balance, the haste, the hurry of their existence. Lady Danvers's comment on the influence of her peremptory engagements, was probably suggested by her own shrewd experience; and those who, in the obscurity of an uneventful home, have ample leisure to apply the touchstone of their deliberate moral and religious code to every trifling action in which they claim a part, should exert among their vaunted virtues some degree of Christian indulgence towards others, whose lives are thronged

with many a complicated crisis—with trials that admit not the delay of a moment's reflection—with the perplexity of a perpetual crowd—with the exhaustion of inevitable occupation. Startled into sobriety by the unprecedented events of the day—terrified by her discovery of the views and feelings of two persons with whom she had been passing in happy confidence her life of joy and enjoyment, Lady Willersdale's retrospective pause found not one single point of self-satisfaction or stability on which to repose herself from her alarm and mortification.

She had no friend unto whom to turn for counsel or consolation; for it was precisely those whom she had made or deemed her own familiar friends, who had betrayed her. She had long refrained from seeking the confidence of a husband whose attention she believed to be engrossed by objects of a very different character—she had long ceased to address herself with the fervour of a sincere vocation, to a higher and more powerful Guide; for she was secretly con-

scious that the pursuits of her present existence were incompatible with the severities of Christian duty.

Lady Willersdale indeed was not of the number of those who make religion the rule of life. She had been educated like many, or most of her degree, in what are termed the strictest principles of the church of England. She had been duly transferred, twice on every Sunday of the year, from the age of five to that of seventeen, to a huge damp pew in the parochial church of Mordaunt. On her journey thither and thence, in the amply populated family coach, she had been edified by the comments of her mother and elder sisters on the gothic array of the various squires and their families, who shared with them the elevated honours of the wainscoted gallery; or by the indignation of Sir Stephen at the fact of "that cursed poacher, John Dobbs, presuming to show himself at church." To these enlightenments were added,

the Christmas groans of her brothers at the length of the sermon; and the peevishness of her younger sisters at the tenacious zeal of their governess in looking out the chapters of the day. The duties of the week did not materially tend to supply the deficiencies of the sabbath. A given portion of crude and obscure catechism was learned by rote in the school-room; and a due amount of sermons filled up its lectorial task. Yet when Lady Lilfield and Lady Gray assumed the importance of their married life, and built school-houses, and distributed tracts in their several villages, the commendations and applause of the admiring world was qualified by a remark, that “no one could wonder at the exhibition of such female excellence: for the Miss Mordaunts had been admirably brought up; a good sensible English education, with good, plain, English principles of religious faith.” There are a certain number of established phrases of this description with which

the British public loves to delude itself and others—a sort of verbal lullaby by which it delights to hum its senses to sleep!

In fact, not one of the Mordaunt family was influenced in thought or action by religious faith. They entertained, collectively, a high respect for the forms and prejudices of society; knelt when they saw other people kneeling, subscribed to missionary societies, and

Gave alms at Easter in a Christian trim.

The male members voted conscientiously against the Catholic Question; and the females would have been shocked at the idea of engaging a laundry maid who frequented the neighbouring meeting house.

Lady Willersdale, indeed, if at times she indulged in contemplations more serious than the rest of her family, and was habitually superior to their narrow prejudices, was indebted only to her better sense for the advantage; her heart was wholly untouched by the oracles of divine truth; nor was her allotted course of destiny

calculated to amend her views. To use or abuse one of those indefinite phrases which I have reprobated, she was possessed of *naturally good principles*; an anomalous expression which seems to comprehend the union of feeble passions and strong sense. At the age of threescore years and ten, our principles—the result of experience and acquired wisdom—may have become *naturally good*; but while we assert the whole human race to be born in sin, the innate virtue of their principles becomes somewhat more than apocryphal!

It required however no deeper knowledge, no purer inspiration than the Mordaunt Park modes of principle and practice might supply, to determine in Helen's mind the true character of Colonel Seymour's addresses, and of Lady Danvers's personal revelations. She felt that they were insulting to herself, in their manner and in their intention; but she felt that in both instances the insult had been courted by her own levity; that she had seemed to share, and

share with delight, the vices and the follies of those who had estimated her character by her apparent indifference to its value; and she shrank from herself, rebuked by the consciousness of her fault. For the first time she beheld in its real light the danger of her conjugal estrangement; she acknowledged that the woman who does not find a friend in her own husband, makes half mankind, at least, her secret enemies. She accused herself of ingratitude towards Lord Willersdale, whose preference had been one of such disinterested affection; she accused herself of frivolity, of self-abasement, of unfeminine facility of address. Conscious of the possession of endowments which ought to have elevated her above the follies to which she had rendered herself so willing a dupe, her mortification found refuge in tears. And as she sat weeping over her magnificent toilet, her thoughts recurred wishfully to the obscure monotony of her early home, where no delights, no splendours courted her acceptance, but where repentance had never

found its way to her bosom. In her paroxysm of self reproach, even the insipid Lady Gray, even the parading proprietress of Beech Park, became objects of envy and admiration to her wounded conscience: *They* had never broken the barrier of duty; they had never braved the infectious approach of infamy! Yet she had sometimes presumed to underrate their merits.

A new source of annoyance now occurred to her mind. Lord Willersdale's silence towards her touching the vicissitudes of his public career, and his present removal from the roof which sheltered her—might they not arise from observation of her levity, might they not be intended as tokens of reproof? He might possibly despise her as much as she despised herself; he might have withdrawn his confidence, his esteem, his tenderness—and for ever. Trembling with these new terrors, she would have given worlds for the power of hastening her determination of the fact. Nay, had he been still in town—*there*—within the compass of the same walls—she

would even then have burst through every restraint of habitual reserve ; have rushed into his presence, implored an explanation of his sentiments, a renewal of his former indulgence. She would have prayed him to love her ; she would have promised, and with fervent sincerity, to love him in return !

And, after all, who among the numerous admirers by whom she had been followed—who, among the gay and brilliant throng with which she had mingled, could match in talents, in accomplishments, in address, or in that fairy-gift, the art of pleasing, with Lord Willersdale ? Yet she had suffered herself to feel repulsed by the calm air of dignity with which he had confirmed his personal influence over senates, sovereigns, and nations ; she had permitted herself to be chilled by apprehension—poor, feeble, girlish apprehension—even there where she was most assured of indulgence and gentle acceptance. She had trifled with the mighty gift of his confiding affections—a gift how much above

her deserving ;—had suffered her hand to be polluted by the touch of libertinism—her ears to be infected by the specious arguments of a seducer. Oh ! how might she atone such aggravated errors !—how best labour to win back to herself the treasure she had lost ! Impatiently, yet with many a secret misdoubting, she longed for the hour when she might rouse her household, and, hastening to Richmond, unburthen her load of penitence, and assure herself of the exact measure of her punishment.

Exactly three hours previous to Mademoiselle Florentine's usual period of rising, or rather, about the moment at which she herself was in the habit of returning home from the orgies of the night, Lady Willersdale summoned her attendant, and desired that her carriage might be brought round in order to convey her to Richmond.

After a due expression of amazement on finding that her lady had not retired to rest, Mademoiselle hastened to obey her unseasonable

demands ; and as quickly returned with an assurance from the groom of the chambers, that, “if Miladi’s intention were to drive to Richmond for the purpose of meeting Milor, Monsieur Vernon had very little doubt he would have left it previous to her arrival.”

“What can this mean?” exclaimed Helen.
“Desire Vernon to speak to me this moment.”

“Comment, Miladi, et avec cette toilette là?”

Lady Willersdale impatiently submitted to hurry on a morning dress, in order to interrogate the reluctant Vernon ; who, readily perceiving her anxiety, judged it expedient to give up his opposition.

“Since she is so eager to be gone,” reasoned the accomplished domestic, “why let her go ; she will only become extremely troublesome by remaining here. She may amuse her fretful impatience by an early drive ; and if on arriving at the villa, and finding my lord absent, she should determine to remain there till his arrival, it will only keep her out of all the bustle of the

duel affair. If things should go against us, it will be as easy to communicate the death of my lord *there*, as here."

With these reasonable views of the subject, Vernon permitted himself to be convicted of a mistake; while he assisted to forward Lady Willersdale's departure on an errand which he well knew was altogether fruitless. Having taken the precaution of giving such directions to the postilions as would prevent the possibility of meeting Lord Willersdale on the road, he handed her ladyship to the carriage; and stood on the hall steps looking after it with a smile of self-satisfaction at his own expert diplomacy.

It was a beautiful summer morning, dewy, and bright, and refreshing; and Helen's spirits were almost exhilarated by the prospect of an immediate meeting with her husband,—an event, which Vernon's momentary reluctance had tempted her to fear was about to be still further delayed. She counted every milestone;

she welcomed every well-known object and turning of the road; it seemed to her that its flowers had never been so profuse, nor its trees so green before. Already she flew along the level ground of Mortlake; already turned into that verdant and shadowy lane which led towards the gates of the villa. It was there that the first days of her union had been passed; it was there that she had neglected to seal the hallowed bond of her wedded happiness; it was there that she had felt the first reprehensible desire to rush into the varied and dazzling pleasures of the world: and it was there—and her heart throbbed with the earnestness of its resolution—it was there she would pour forth her confession, recant her errors, and become, in her turn, a suitor for a renewal of confidence and love. No more reserve—no more secrets—no jealous consciousness of inferiority—no peevish apprehension; all should be henceforth candour and sincerity between herself and Lord Willersdale.

The lodge gates flew open on the approach of the carriage. "Is Lord Willersdale gone?" exclaimed the agitated Helen, to the porter's flurried wife, who stood open-mouthed with consternation at so unexpected a visit. "No, my lady," stammered the woman, silencing a vociferous child who was tugging at her apron; "that is, my lady,—my lord——" The carriage was already rolling along the sweep towards the portico. There were no visible signs of habitation except a gardener's boy with his broom; and a yawning housemaid, *en papillotes*, lounging at one of the bed-room windows. The hall-bell had already swung its echoing summons; but Helen was unable to repress her impatience. The carriage steps were let down by her order, and she rushed unannounced into the vestibule. "Is Lord Willersdale here?" she once more demanded of the housekeeper, whom she met curtseying and arranging her shawl in the entry.

"His lordship has not been here since you

left Richmond together, four months ago, my lady," replied the astonished Mrs. Tomkins. "I have received no letter from his lordship or from Mr. Vernon, to prepare me for the family's arrival; otherwise, my lady, I trust you will believe that things would be in very different order. I can scarcely invite your ladyship into the drawing-room, for the great glasses are all papered, the lustres bagged, the chairs and sofas——"

"What can all this mean!" faltered Lady Willersdale, without listening to the details of her explanation, and opening the door of a little book-room, to which the half-closed shutters imparted an air of unusual dreariness. "What can all this mean! Vernon's information—his subsequent reluctance—surely, surely some strange occurrence must be the motive of all his inconsistency!"

"Your ladyship cannot have breakfasted at this early hour," resumed the fussy Mrs. Tomkins, who had been labouring to dispose the

apartment in its usual trim. “Will you permit me, Me’em, to send you in a cup of tea—of chocolate—of coffee; or perhaps, my lady, you would prefer a sandwich after your drive?”

“Nothing, Tomkins, I thank you; I am in haste to return to town.”

“To town my lady?—Excuse my taking the liberty of saying that I was in hopes you were come to pass some days at Richmond. The gardens, as your ladyship will perceive, are in their highest beauty; and I was observing to Lady Danvers’s head gardener at the *feete* at Burwood last night, that in my opinion no comparison could be made between the lawn at Rosemount, and ——”

“Mrs. Tomkins, will you be so obliging as to give immediate orders that the horses may not be taken off: I shall return instantly to town.”

Disappointed of her harangue, the voluminous housekeeper sailed out of the room; and in a few minutes curtseyed herself back again, radiant with the importance of a negative.

“The postilions, my lady, are extremely sorry to say, as your ladyship required them to make their way down with so much speed, that the horses will require at least an hour’s refreshment before they can return to London.”

“Tormenting suspense!” exclaimed Lady Willersdale. “By this delay I may be prevented following him—may be prevented seeing him again.”

“The head groom, my lady, assures me that his lord is very particular about them iron grays, Me’em; and that it is more than his place is worth to overwork them.”

“Send off a messenger to Richmond, and let post-horses be brought here as soon as possible.”

“Oh! dear, my lady! your ladyship surely forgets that it is the Hampton race week; there is not a pair of posters to be had all round the neighbourhood. Lady Danvers’s people and myself, my lady, had agreed to a subscription chaise to Moulsey, and were disappointed, be-

cause neither the Star nor the Talbot, nor any other of the hotels, had ever a horse in their stables."

Lady Willersdale was now convinced that the inauspicious fates were leagued against her peace ; and the impatience natural to her sex and age, became redoubled by every successive obstacle that arose to thwart her wishes. She saw that the obsequious Mrs. Tomkins had already determined to retard her departure till she had attempted to ascertain from the London servants the motives of the apparent *contre-temps* ;—*et force fut de prendre patience*. She contented herself, therefore, with submissively requesting that both men and horses might be persuaded to limit their necessary "refreshment" to the shortest possible lapse of time ; and that the glass doors of the chamber might be thrown open to the lawn.

There are few things more melancholy than to visit *alone*, and in the coldness and disarray of deserted location, some mansion which we

have previously inhabited in all the cheer of society, and with all the animation of pleasures shared by those we love. There was something inexpressibly mournful to the desponding Helen in the loneliness of those blossomy thickets, and the luxuriant foliage of those arched walks, which had been wearing the glories of their fragrance and their shade in unobserved and listless beauty. Volleys of birds, bursting from the shrubberies, seemed to have built their fearless nests more profusely in a spot secure from intrusion, but whose artificial beauties bore the character of a resort consecrated to the pleasures of the great and gay. Solitude can have no fitting temple in the garden of a Richmond villa !

In the house, a tone of still more cheerless desolation prevailed. The music she had last played was lying on the desk ; the book she had last read still remained on the *console* of her dressing-room, marked by a withered twig which had been brought to her by Lord Willersdale,

as an evidence that Spring had sent forth its harbingers in the bursting leaves. Since that period how little had he seemed to interest himself in intercourse of this familiar nature ! But then how little had she encouraged his advances by marking either solicitude for his presence, or touching his own pursuits or avocations. Like a restless spirit, she wandered from chamber to chamber ; in each of which the half-closed windows and furniture, most housewifely reversed by the preservative care of Mrs. Tomkins, still further aggravated her personal feelings of discomfort. At length that active functionary who, by the opening and shutting of doors, perceived that her ladyship was in the act of a voyage of discovery, could no longer repress her desire to become officiously and officially troublesome. Just as the meditative Helen was moralizing with some slight accession of sentiment over a pair of gloves and a cane belonging to Lord Willersdale, which had been accidentally left in the billiard-room, the Tomkins,

who had been actively employed in refreshing her toilet—*toute endimanchée*, and with a face angular with the sharpness of her curiosity, arrived at her elbow.

“ I very humbly beg your ladyship’s pardon that you should find things lying about in this disgraceful manner; but in fact, my lady, Mary the housemaid is getting old, and is apt to neglect things. But then she has been about the place ever since my late lady’s time, and one is willing to overlook something in an old and faithful servant. My late lord, Me’em, as I generally acquaint strangers who visit the villa, purchased this place at the period his Majesty was so much taken up with the palace at Kew, that many persons thought the Royal Family would make it their permanent residence. My late lord, Me’em”—

“ So I have heard, Mrs. Tomkins,” said Helen carelessly, as she attempted an escape—

“ Your ladyship is going towards the green bed-room; you will probably wish to see the

new carpet which Mr. Vernon has sent from town, and which is not yet laid down."

"Thank you, Tomkins, I am quite indifferent on the subject."

"But the secretares, my lady, which his lordship desired might be put up in your dressing-room; may I request the favour of knowing whether they are to stand beside the fire-place, or between the piers?"

"What were Lord Willersdale's orders?"

"That nothing should be done till your ladyship had been consulted."

Helen found it incumbent on herself to appear interested in these trivial particulars; but no sooner had she exhausted Mrs. Tomkins's observations, conjectures, and admeasurements respecting the appropriate position of the new furniture which had been selected for her use by Lord Willersdale, than she hastened to escape the officious loquacity of her persecutor by returning into the gardens. Traversing with hurried steps the level lawn—that beau-

tiful and peculiarly English feature of landscape gardening—she reached a wide terrace shaded by lofty trees which overlooked the river, commanding a magnificent view of the wooded heights of Richmond.

But the spot was any thing but propitious to the recomposure of her mind. The arching branches of the trees overhanging the seat on which she had thrown herself to rest,—the waves rippling below, were but a reduplication of the scene which, a few short hours before, had brought such heaviness to her bosom, such reproach to her mind. Again she seemed to hear the seductive pleadings by which she had been insulted; again her whole frame seemed to recoil from the fervour of entreaties which threatened infamy and perdition to herself and to Lord Willersdale. Again the consciousness of her errors—of her dangers—rose before her; and the same restless impatience to redeem herself by flying for security into the arms she had deserted, began to agitate her quivering lips

and tearful eyes; when a messenger from the house acquainted her that all was ready for her return to town.

Welcome tidings! How gladly did she hasten her footsteps over that verdant turf,—how scrupulously avoid the verbose adieus of the indignant housekeeper! Bidding the servants exert their utmost diligence on the road, and backing the command by a bribe, Lord Willersdale's iron grays appeared to recover their exhausted powers in a moment. Yet notwithstanding a degree of speed which caused both turnpikemen and idlers on the road to stand gazing after the flying wheels, Helen secretly accused both men and horses of a perverse opposition to her desires. Like Imogen she could have exclaimed

Oh! for a horse with wings to bear me on its back! Her breath became fluttered with the trepidation of her mind; her cold hands could scarcely draw aside the clustering hair from her clammy forehead; her whole soul was over-

whelmed by one of those mental foreshowings which we deride under the name of presentiment, and beneath whose imaginary influence the bravest spirits have been known to sink rebuked.

Before they reached the busy confluence of the parks, her agony was at its height; and she had scarcely sufficient consciousness remaining to perceive that an immense crowd impeded all entrance towards Hamilton Place. The carriage stopped abruptly; and Helen, rousing herself from her painful trance, looked out to ascertain the nature of the impediment. She beheld a multitude formed of an even admixture of the higher and lower classes;—a stage-coach and several carriages were gathered in a group;—a police officer was directing his authoritative vigilance towards the dispersion of the mob;—while a vacant air of general consternation pervaded every countenance.

“Horrible!”—“no hope!”—“Sir Astley Cooper,”—“lamentable fatality!” and other

words of equally alarming import, now reached her ears.

“Inquire what has happened!” exclaimed Lady Willersdale to her footman, who was standing at the carriage window with a look of vague terror, and with his hand to his hat as if waiting her orders.

But before the man could obey or reply, Lavender had recognized the carriage, and began to make a peremptory passage through the crowd.

“Gentlemen—gentlemen! the Willersdale livery;—for God’s sake make way for her ladyship.” And with a still more stupid stare the wondering mob divided to let her pass.

The equipages of Lady Danvers, and of two medical men, were drawn up before her door; and on the steps stood Vernon replying to the eager inquiries of a knot of gentlemen. His face was pale as death. A sort of unnatural and delirious energy sustained the courage of the agonized Helen till she reached the fatal

door; and found Vernon in waiting to hand her out. She could no longer pronounce a single word; but gasped heavily with an air of interrogation.

“Madam, my lord is still alive,” said he, replying to her mute inquiry. “The surgeons are now extracting the ball.”

In another minute he was employed in conveying Lady Willersdale into the house, in a state of utter insensibility.

CHAPTER XII.

I with my hand at midnight held your head,
And like the watchful minutes to the hour,
Still and anon cheered up the heavy time,
Saying, What lack you? and Where lies your grief?
Or What good love may I perform for you?

King John.

It was towards evening, and in a darkened chamber, that the wretched Lady Willersdale became restored to a partial consciousness of her situation, and of the horrible vicissitudes in which it had originated. A servant, to whose services she was unaccustomed, was supporting her head; for Mademoiselle Florentine had made use of her national privilege, and been "*trop saisie*," to be of any assistance on such an occasion; while a gentleman, whom she re-

cognized as the family apothecary, was seated with professional gravity by her bedside. It is not to be supposed that he was less mindful of his characteristic right of being troublesome, than the Parisian waiting-maid; so that when the unhappy Helen began to recover her powers of articulation sufficiently to give utterance to the doubts which agonized her mind, he replied by an urgent request to be permitted to inspect her tongue; and when, half maddened by his apathetic indifference to her alarms, she reiterated her interrogations with almost frantic violence, he insisted upon feeling her pulse, and talked of fever and the lancet. Helen wrung her hands in utter despair.

“If you are desirous of moderating my agitation,” she exclaimed, “relieve the horrible suspense by which I am at present tortured. Lord Willersdale—Sir! speak, I implore you—you have nothing further to fear from my weakness;—I have steeled my courage to hear the

worst you can have to communicate—Speak Sir—is my husband yet alive?”

“ Your ladyship must pardon me for observing, that you are greatly mistaken in supposing your physical strength equal to any shock of an extraordinary kind. Your ladyship’s pulse—”

“ Oh, God ! he equivocates,” shrieked Lady Willersdale, falling back on her pillow. “ He dares not announce the fatal truth. Nay, then, with my own eyes I will assure myself of my calamity.” And she was attempting to throw herself from the bed, when Mr. Soda forcibly opposed his authority to the movement.

“ Your ladyship must pardon me ; I cannot subject myself to the responsibility of such a proceeding.”

Sprighted by a fool, sprighted and angered worse,

Lady Willersdale felt that her patience and her strength were alike unequal to all further contest. She clasped her hands upon her bosom,

and prayed that heaven would support her during the severity of her trial.

Fortunately the female servant who had been an unobtrusive assistant in the scene, was gifted with a moderate portion of good sense and good feeling, unshackled by the trammels of professional routine.

“ Do not take on so, my lady,” she whispered in plain blunt English. “ The bullet has been cut out ; and the surgeons think my lord may recover.”

“ Heaven’s mercy be thanked !” exclaimed the re-assured and grateful Helen, wholly unmindful of the harsh terms in which the intelligence had been conveyed ; and resting her head upon the rough hand of her kind informant, she burst into an agony of tears, which at once relieved the painful tension of her heart.

Mr. Soda was elaborate in his reproaches to Mary for her indiscretion. “ Young woman,” said he, with stern dignity and a reproving brow, “ you have to answer for her ladyship’s

present dangerous state of agitation." But Mary, who possessed some feminine insight into the relief of tears, remained unabashed and unconvinced.

Lady Willersdale's next trial of the placability of the irate apothecary, was an eager entreaty that she might be permitted to visit the chamber of the sufferer, and satisfy herself by personal observation of his condition, and of her own prospects of consolation and trust.

"Impossible ! his lordship, madam, has been left to repose after the pain of the extraction. The operating surgeon, who is watching the result, has given orders that the slightest disturbance should be carefully avoided. Lady Danvers herself has not been permitted to penetrate further than the dressing-room."

"Then so far, at least, may his wife be allowed to approach," observed Helen, renewing her movements of impatience.

"Your ladyship will excuse me. The feelings of conjugal affection might render it im-

possible for you to restrain your distress within desirable bounds; while Lady Danvers, under similar circumstances, can be better trusted."

This was an undeniable truth.

"Will you at least oblige me by visiting Lord Willersdale's medical advisers, and relieving my mind with their latest opinion?"

"On condition that I have your ladyship's promise not to remove from this apartment till my return." And satisfied with her prompt acquiescence, Mr. Soda departed upon his errand; leaving her to the strict charge of her compassionate attendant.

"Mary!" said Lady Willersdale turning eagerly towards her, as soon as they were alone; "you have already done me an infinite service; and must now speak out undisguisedly. Is your lord's danger supposed to be past?"

"No, my lady," replied the girl, firmly; but in a tone of humble sympathy. "I heard Mr. Vernon say that there were *some* hopes of his recovery; but that the operation—I think

he called it—had left my lord very weak ; and that every thing depended on his being kept quiet.”

“ At what hour did Lord Willersdale return home ? Are there any hopes of discovering the assassin ? ”

“ My lord was brought home by two strange gentlemen in a strange carriage, about an hour after your ladyship left the house. But I heard them say that the *duel* was fought before seven in the morning.”

“ Duel ! ” faltered Lady Willersdale, breathless with renewed horror. “ Duel ! surely—surely—you mistake. Lord Willersdale was attacked in the street by —— ”

“ Mr. Vernon, my lady, informed all the gentlemen who crowded to the door to inquire after his lordship, that he had been dangerously wounded in a *duel*. I am sure that was the word.”

“ And did you hear,” resumed Helen, inarticulately, the blood forsaking her cheeks and

lips, as the difficulty of assigning an enemy to Lord Willersdale connected itself in her mind with certain remembrances of a personal nature, —“did you chance to hear the *name* of his antagonist?”

“An-tagonist?”

“The gentleman—who—wounded him?”

“I heard it, my lady, but have forgotten?”

“Was it—was it”—she pressed her hand heavily upon her bosom in attempting to recover her breath, “was it—Colonel Seymour?”

“It was a Colonel something, my lady; but I cannot take upon me to remember the exact name—I think it *might* be Seymour.”

When the sapient Mr. Soda stole back on tiptoe into the room, he found Lady Willersdale once more stiffened into the coldness of total insensibility; and he commenced the renewal of his previous services by a vociferous reprimand to the astonished Mary; whose indiscretion of tongue he instantly suspected as the origin of the evil. Finding, however, his

utmost attempts wholly ineffectual in restoring the consciousness of his patient, he sent to request the coalition of his medical brethren in the house; and Lady Danvers, to whom the condition of her brother no longer afforded an excuse for withholding her services or sympathy from his suffering wife, condescended to follow the surgeons into Lady Willersdale's apartment. From their united efforts the unconscious Helen finally derived a tardy benefit; but from the intelligence with which, unasked, they proceeded to re-assure her mind, she found an instantaneous and far more permanent relief. Every disastrous detail of the duel was calmly laid before her by the judicious attention of Dr. W.; who was well aware that at the age, and in the position of Lady Willersdale, imagination far outstrips even the most terrific truth. Her gratitude for this opportune relief from her worst suspicions, was unspeakable. That she was wholly innocent of the event was scarcely less welcome to her feelings, than that the event

itself had already lost half its early prospects of peril.

She had still another concession to obtain from Dr. W.; his professional sanction to her passing the night in the chamber adjoining that of Lord Willersdale. “Indeed—indeed—you may rely on my prudence,” said Helen, urgently, to the *brusque*, but worthy physician. “You perceive how much I already respect your prohibitions; for nothing less than your assurances of the necessity of perfect quiet to your patient, would detain me even now from my husband’s presence.”

Dr. W., an acute and habitual observer of human nature, did not fail to remark the sneer which passed over the beautiful countenance of Lady Danvers at these words. He had been already prepossessed against her by the eagerness with which she had informed herself touching the propriety and possibility of directing Lord Willersdale’s attention to his worldly affairs, previous to an operation imminently

dangerous. Although somewhat cauterized in feeling by the habitual spectacle of human nature in its degrading struggle with disease and death, he felt that a solicitude of this description at such a crisis was unsisterly—*unwomanly*; and he mistrusted the heart in which it had arisen. Lady Danvers's opposition, therefore, to the intreaties of her sister-in-law, and her careful representation of the dangers that might accrue both to Helen and to the sufferer from any increase of agitation, fell on a disregardful ear. The gentle tenderness of Lady Willersdale's manner, and her youthful simplicity of address, interested him warmly in favour of her petition.

“I think I may trust you,” said he. “But remember, my dear lady, that I am wholly responsible for his lordship's well-doing, and that many will be eager to call me to account should an unfavourable change occur. You must therefore give me your word not to attempt an interview without my leave.”

“For *his* sake you may believe that I shall comply with your orders.”

“And for your own I must further beg that you will lie down and try to sleep during the night. You have suffered more than you are aware of from the shock of this disastrous affair. And now good bye for the present ;—for I must report the progress of our proceedings in a quarter where they are honoured with the deepest interest. I shall look in on my return from Carlton Palace.”

In the house of death, the authority of the physician becomes for the moment paramount. Lady Willersdale was all obedience to one whom she regarded as in some measure the arbiter of her husband's destiny ; and even that absolute functionary, Mr. Vernon, became especially careful that Dr. W.'s instructions should be obeyed to the letter. When the night closed in, Lady Willersdale threw herself down, feeble and exhausted, on a sofa that had been prepared in the dressing-room ; while Lady

Danvers, who had carefully avoided any explanation or familiar intercourse with her sister-in-law, by returning during the interim to her own house for a change of dress, disposed herself to rest in a capacious arm-chair. The door between the dressing-room and Lord Willersdale's chamber was closed ; but in the silence of the night they could hear even the tiptoe movements of the assiduous Mr. Soda, who was appointed to watch by his side.

Forty-eight hours had now elapsed since the perturbed Helen had tasted the refreshment of sleep ; a night of the most trying vigil had already harassed her soul, and two days, uniting the excitements of every passion inhabiting her gentle frame, had completed her mental and bodily exhaustion. Her heart ached within her with its weariness ; but the agitation of her nerves rendered her feverishly restless, even under the heavy pressure of her fatigues. Nature, however, could no longer resist the struggle ; and with the tears yet wet upon her

cheek, and the sigh still bursting from her bosom—*she slept*. Oh ! miserable sleep of the unhappy !—who shall presume to call thee rest !

The fearful thoughts which had perplexed her waking, failed not to visit the dreams of her uneasy pillow. At one moment an angel, radiant of light, with the palm of peace within its hands, seemed to guide her footsteps amid the intricate paths of a mountain, clustered with groves, and vineyards, and fig-gardens. Cheerful faces met them at every turn ; the carol of joyous songs was floating on the air ; the freshness of a thousand sportive breezes, the fragrance of unnumbered flowers, gave to their gradual ascent the soothing spell of a fairy vision. In the infatuation of her joy, Lady Willersdale seemed to pause, in order to tear from the overladen boughs a single blossom of this mysterious land. When, lo ! the rocking earth crumbled beneath her feet, and a dark abyss of horror opened, like some measureless

gulf, before her. Dizzied and agonized by the transition, she turned towards her companion for support ; but the hand, on which she seized with the confidence of affection, darted its fiendlike talons into her flesh ; the voice, to whose reassuring accents she had appealed, breathed into her ears, with a hot blast of sulphurous breath, words of horrible reprobation. The gnashing of teeth, the bitter howls of physical agony, the shrieks of tardy and unavailing repentance, were around her. “Woman ! dost thou know me *now* ?” muttered the awful figure by her side.

And as she turned to gaze upon the mysterious phantom, the lineaments beneath its hooded cowl were *still*—still and ever—the features of the beautiful Honoria !

With the beaded dew of terror hanging in chill prominence upon her forehead, the soul-stricken Helen struggled back to the consciousness of life. The vision of her painful sleep had impressed itself with such awful reality

upon her mind, that she had scarcely courage to turn her eyes round the obscured chamber. All there was still and peaceful, and wearing its ordinary guise of human habitation ! Yet when the flickering of the night-lamp fell upon the figure of Lady Danvers, who was quietly slumbering in the chair which half concealed her flowing vestments of white, she shuddered as she gazed upon features connected with the hideous phantasm of her dream. Still, however, with the fascinated self-resignation of a heated imagination, she could not choose but gaze and gaze again on the object of her alarm. And for the first time she seemed to detect, upon that alabaster brow, a contraction of meanness and malice ; for the first time to read upon that curved lip the sneer of an enemy ; for the first time to trace among the lines which the hand of dissipation had begun to trace upon that cheek of fairest symmetry, records of vicious years and evil passions. The heavy sleep which had

moulded Honoria's countenance into the marble immobility of death, seemed not akin to the balmy refreshment of human rest;—it was rather a pause accorded by the ministers of sin to qualify their victim, or their agent, for fresh efforts !

Lady Willersdale folded her meek hands over her bosom, and fervently prayed for relief from the fantastic terrors which oppressed her reason. Like a child, who has been suddenly restored to the bosom of a forgotten parent, she seemed to cling to the tender mercies of Providence ; and to put her fervent trust in its protection, with an earnestness of love and submission hitherto unknown within her heart ! Enwrapped in the self-concentration of mental prayer, the agitation of her soul gradually subsided into tranquillity ; and with every thought subdued to peace, and every alarm moderated by the hovering wings of sleep, which once more fanned her burning eyelids, she sank into progressive self-oblivion. And as she “ lay

down in her loveliness," fair, humble, and tranquillized as a hushed infant, it seemed

As though a rose could shut and be a bud again.

Once more, alas ! the prevailing demons of the realm of night were permitted to approach her with their incantations ; and again dark and horrific thoughts began to mingle with the disjointed images that surrounded her dreaming mind ; but they were now fraught with the calmness and immobility entrancing her mortal frame. A consciousness of chilly stillness, of silent and lonely bewilderment, seemed to overwhelm her paralyzed heart. She woke, or appeared to wake, in the oppressive atmosphere of a glimmering cavern. The insignia of the grave were around her,—the clinging shroud and clammy head-cloth. Mouldering coffins, and the wasting relics of mortality, were piled on every side ; the creeping worm, the scaly reptile, the gnawing and noisome vermin of the vault, alone gave tokens of vitality amid the general silence. And, by her side, an icy mass

of human clay lay perishing in the horrible loathsomeness of frail mortality. Yet could she not forbear to rend aside the gravecloths, and look upon its wasting face; for an awful sympathy seemed to endear her to that shapeless and revolting thing; and, lo! as she unfolded the shroud, its fearful inmate slowly turned towards her, *and embraced her*. And it spake to her with the voice of her husband; and its disfigured features were those of Lord Willersdale; and when she would have extricated herself from its foul caresses, and fled from that appalling region, Honoria—arrayed in the vain and tinselled garments of festivity,—Honoria stood waving her scornful hands upon the stone steps of the vault;—with fierce malice repelling her approach. Again she felt the cold damp embrace of the re-animated corpse; and again, by the powerful impulse of her recoiling frame, she threw off the heaviness of her troubled sleep.

But on regathering her bewildered senses,

she perceived that Lady Danvers no longer occupied the vacant chair. The brightness of the morning sun, piercing through the crevices of the shutters, danced cheerfully on all the familiar objects by which she was surrounded; and the door leading to Lord Willersdale's chamber was partly unclosed.

Unconsciously she started to her feet, and, wrapping her loosened garments around her, reached its threshold. The murmur, the measured and uneventful murmur of voices from within emboldened her to enlarge, but with a cautious hand, the aperture of communication; and as she stood with the other pressed fervently upon her bounding heart, she tried to suspend her breath that she might catch the faint and welcome accents of her husband. Even through the tears that obscured her failing sight, Lady Willersdale could plainly discern the outline of his sister's figure bending tenderly over his bed of sickness.

“ It is strange that I should already feel so weakened,” were the first feebly-uttered words she could detect. “ Pain and the loss of blood seem to have wrested all the energy out of my heart. I can scarcely tell you what childish thoughts have disturbed the intervals of my rest ; I can scarcely tell you how lonely and deserted I have felt myself, with only yonder drowsy and lugubrious stranger to bear me company.”

“ You surely cannot fancy, dearest Willersdale, that I abandoned you to Soda’s solitary vigilance. Throughout the night I have been watching close beside you ; and nothing but W.’s peremptory orders prevented me from making my presence known to you. Admire my prudent silence, when I acknowledge that not a breath, not a murmur, not a movement of yours has escaped me, from the instant that the ball was extracted until now.”

“ My own dear kind Honoria !” murmured

Lord Willersdale; and Helen fancied she heard him imprint a kiss of gratitude upon the hand of the deceiver.

“Has the messenger returned from Richmond?” he continued in a still fainter tone.

“Many hours ago.”

“And what tidings?”

“Lady Willersdale had left Holly-Wood before his arrival.”

“And can no one give us intelligence of her destination?—You, from whom she appeared to conceal nothing, can you not conjecture whither she is gone?”

“I have every reason to suppose she will be here in the course of the morning,” replied Lady Danvers, evasively. “At Helen’s age of thoughtless gaiety, one is willing to spare her the startling spectacle of the real afflictions of human life.”

“Ever kind and considerate for others,” resumed Lord Willersdale in a tone of affec-

tion ; “ yet ever regardless of your own trouble, your own feelings ! ”

“ My dear brother ! you to speak thus, who are possessed of every right that kindred or gratitude can claim ! What tie of affection self-imposed, or imposed by others, can match with the close and spontaneous affection of two orphans like ourselves,—boasting one blood, one faith, one heart ? No ! my dear brother, believe me that none have ever felt towards you, or can ever feel, with the fond and confiding love cherished by the last daughter of the Willersdales ! ”

Once more the involuntary listener fancied she heard a token of grateful regard pass from the lips of her husband to the hand of the hypocrite ; and she could perceive, by the lengthened pause that ensued, how deeply his debilitated feelings were excited by her deceptious protestations.

“ My dearest Honoria ! ” at length resumed

Lord Willersdale, “these gentle and flattering professions may be shortly put to the test. I have every reason to believe that W. and his solemn confraternity—including yonder watchful sentinel, who is snoring so industriously at his post—regard this unlucky wound as a more serious affair than you imagine. I am prepared, my dear sister, for the worst;—and I trust I can nerve myself to die, as I have lived,—like a man. But I own I cannot think, without a pang, upon the young, the helpless creature, I am about to surrender to the temptations of the world. You have probably discovered in my wife no attraction beyond her beauty; but whenever you know her better, sister, you will recognize in Helen’s character a purity, a single-heartedness, a feminine simplicity, lovely beyond—oh! far, far beyond the mere personal charms you admire. And these the world, in which *we* live, has not yet infected with its poisonous breath.”

“Let us hope so!” replied Lady Danvers,

oracularly ; yet lowering her voice to a still more cautious pitch.

“ How tenderly I have loved her—how admiringly noted the girlish frankness of her mind !” rejoined Lord Willersdale, “ I have hitherto screened from your notice, under the paltry and vulgar apprehension that you might despise me as the doting husband of a beautiful child. But I own it now, Honoria. I own it in the scrutinizing presence of that God, before whose tribunal I may be shortly summoned : I own it in *your* presence, dearest sister ! unto whom, as to my nearest, and best, and most faithful friend, I would willingly bequeath the guidance of my Helen’s perilous widowhood. Take her to your heart when I am gone ; foster her gentle virtues, for their promise is great ; and be mild in your judgment of her errors, for they are those of her inexperienced youth. And if ever your anger or mortification should be excited by an appearance of levity or waywardness in her character, think on your brother,

my Honoria, and resume your ordinary indulgence. Lead her tenderly from the paths of error ; and, for *my* sake, restrain the severity of your remonstrances !—”

“ I will at least pray, that she may prove worthy of your present solicitude,” replied the callous Lady Danvers, wholly unmoved, and in a tone of mysterious implication. “ In the mean time, I trust that her early arrival will mitigate our uneasiness on her account. I am expecting my poor girls too every hour ; I sent off expresses yesterday, both to Hastings and to Eton ; for my children would break their hearts if they knew their uncle were suffering from serious illness, and they at a distance.”

“ Kind creatures !” murmured Lord Wilersdale, thoroughly blinded by the prompt address of his sister ; although a daily and hourly spectator of her indifference to, and ignorance of, the sentiments and opinions of her alienated offspring. “ Kind creatures ! I shall

indeed be gratified to find them once more around me. But I own it grieves and perplexes me to find my wife—my dear, thoughtless Helen, absent at such a moment ! ”

Lady Danvers was about to reply, but the agitated Helen, no longer able to repress her emotions—no longer alive to the recollection of Dr. W.’s extorted promise, glided into the room, and, sinking by the bedside, covered the extended hand of Lord Willersdale with mingled tears and kisses, hurriedly and fervently renewed. All her preceding apprehensions, and hopes, and agonies, her tenderness and her penitence, seemed to concentrate themselves into one passionate convulsion of grateful love !

Deeply penetrated by every word that had fallen from her husband’s lips—by professions terribly attested by the solemnity of a dying bed—by expressions of an attachment so long desired, so long misdoubted, Helen entertained neither a thought nor a care for the detected baseness and animosity of her designing sister-

in-law. Her whole heart and soul were influenced by a far more potent impulse; by the tenderest anxiety for her husband's safety, heightened into agony by the new and delightful certainty of his affection. At the last she spake with her tongue! And what can match the eloquent outpouring of a woman's bosom, secure of being beloved, and secure of coveting no earthly distinction beyond that blessed and inalienable treasure! Reckless, or unconscious of Lord Willersdale's deepening emotions, she unfolded the whole mystery of her forced reserve; of her affectation of indifference; of her attempt—her unsuccessful attempt—to repay her imaginary loss with the false coinage of the world's applause;—of her heart's bitter recoil upon itself;—of her repentance;—of her renewed desire for his estranged affections;—of her humble trust in his continued indulgence.

Had they met according to her expectations on the preceding day, much would she have added respecting her misgivings—her secret

doubts of the truth of his affection. But on this delicate head, she was now thoroughly re-assured; and Helen was too honest, too generous, to court for her own idle satisfaction, a renewal of professions which had now become altogether superfluous.

“ I know now—I am satisfied now, that you love me,” faltered the weeping Helen, as she nestled her beautiful head in the bosom of the invalid. “ But you do not love me more than I am desirous of meriting, by an unqualified return, the gift, the *blessing* of your affection. Believe me, oh ! believe me, that I have seen and proved, and firmly resolved to shun, the dangers of the path to which you so rashly consigned my unguarded footsteps. Henceforth be our pains and pleasures shared together. I have no fears but that Heaven will listen to our prayers;—that you will quickly be restored to health and to me. My care, my tenderness, shall second the skill of your attendants, and —”

“ How is this ?” abruptly interrupted Dr. W.,

who, backed by the surgeon in attendance, was standing unobserved at the bed-foot; while the discomfited Soda rubbed his eyes, and shook his ears in the background, and Lady Danvers retreated to the window in sneering admiration of the group.

“How is this? my patient disturbed and harassed at this unseasonable hour!—Lady Willersdale, I relied upon your word of honour; Lady Danvers I confided in your experience and authority.”

“You must pardon us, my dear doctor,” murmured the exhausted Willersdale, “be assured that I only am to blame.”

“When Dr. W. has been an eye-witness of your irrepressible ecstasies, my dear Helen,” exclaimed Honoria, with a smile of superlative contempt, “he will acknowledge the fruitlessness of any opposition or argument of mine.”

“Well, well; be satisfied with the mischief you have done. I beg of you ladies to leave the room. Mr. Soda, some ether—Mr. Soda,

throw open the window—Mr. Soda, support Lord Willersdale's head.—More air!—nothing but an ordinary fainting fit!—Good God! Mr. Soda, what can you have meant by permitting these cursed women to talk his lordship to death!”

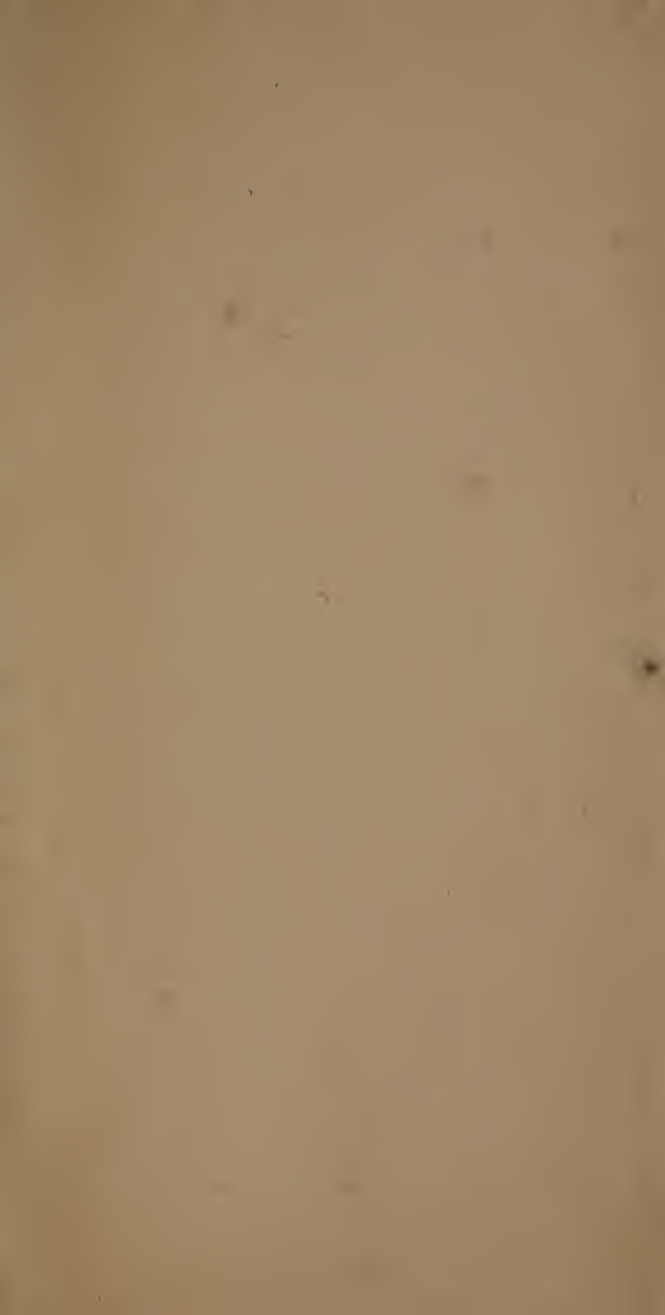
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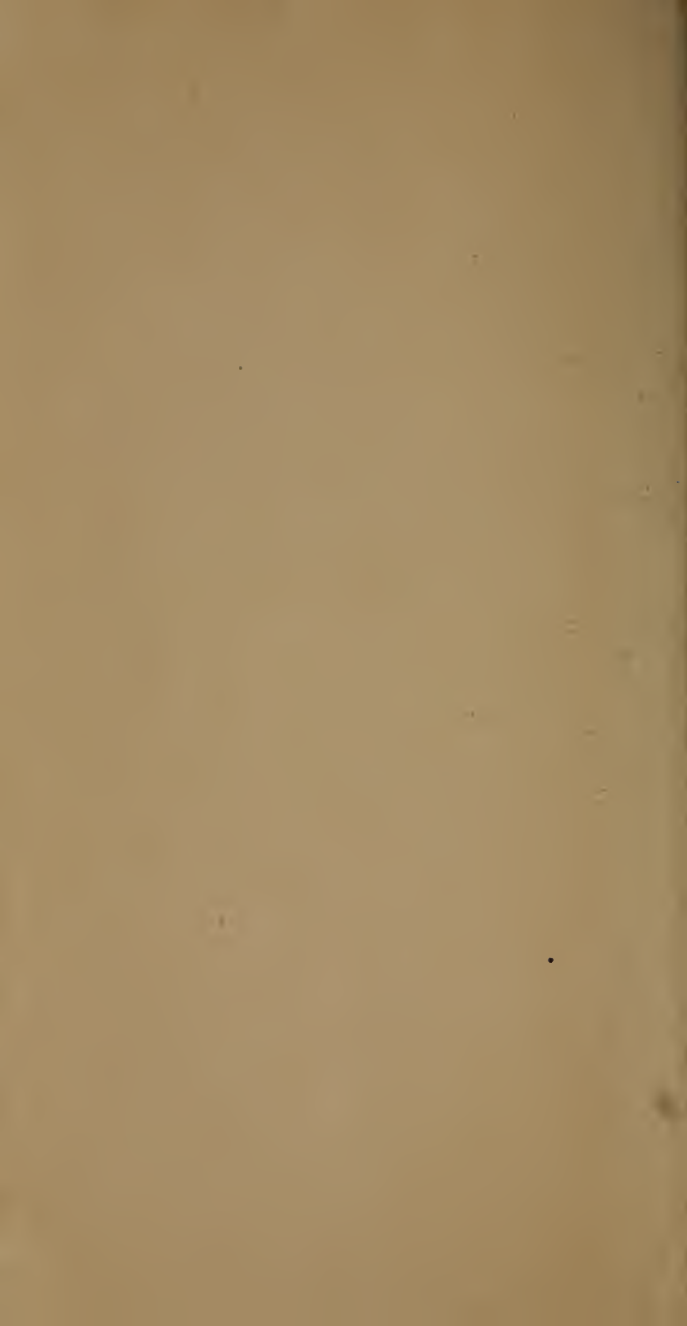
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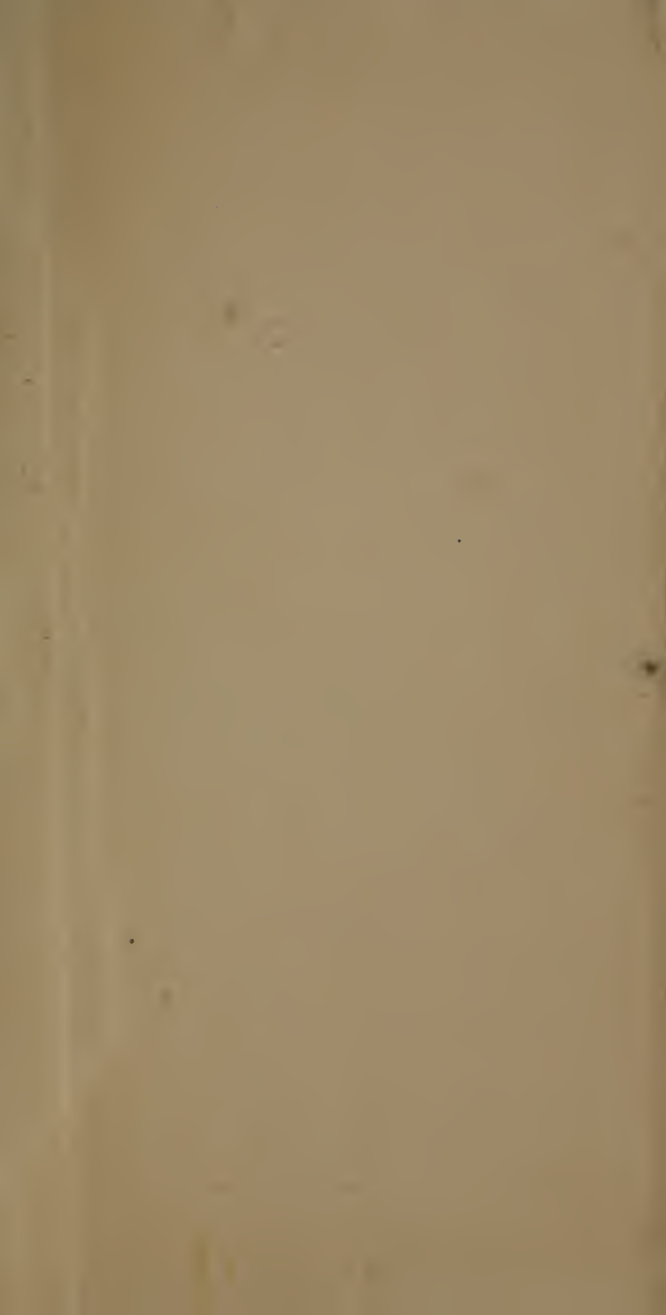
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